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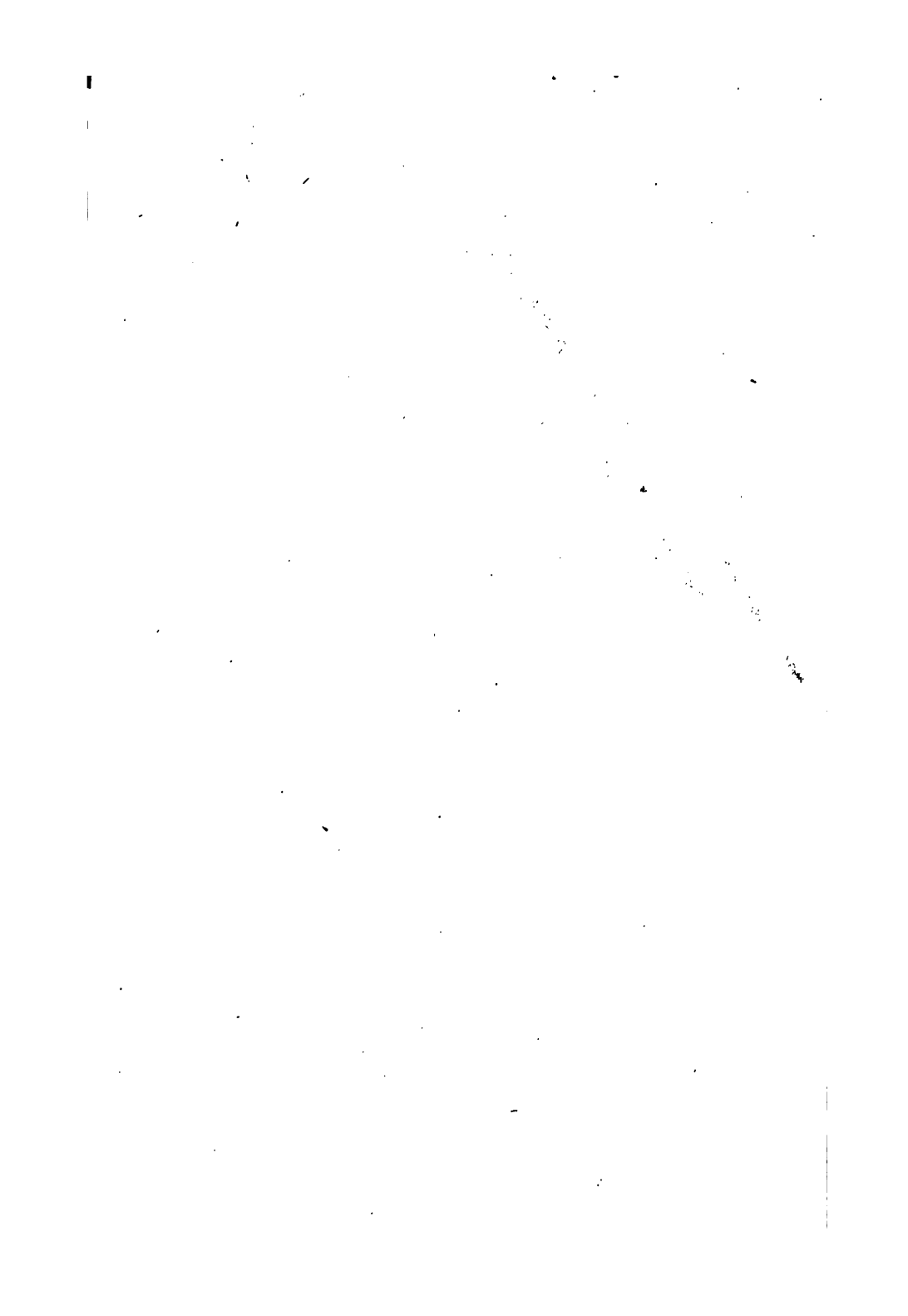




MILDRED'S WEDDING.



VOL. I.



MILDRED'S WEDDING.

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MILDRED'S WEDDING.

A Family History.

BY FRANCIS DERRICK,

AUTHOR OF "THE KIDDLE-A-WINK."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

"Already full of years and heaviness,
I turn to former thoughts of young desires."

MICHAEL ANGELO.

LONDON:

FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.

BEDFORD STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1865.

250. h 256-

LONDON :
CLAYTON AND CO., TEMPLE PRINTING WORKS,
BOUVERIE STREET, E.C.



TO

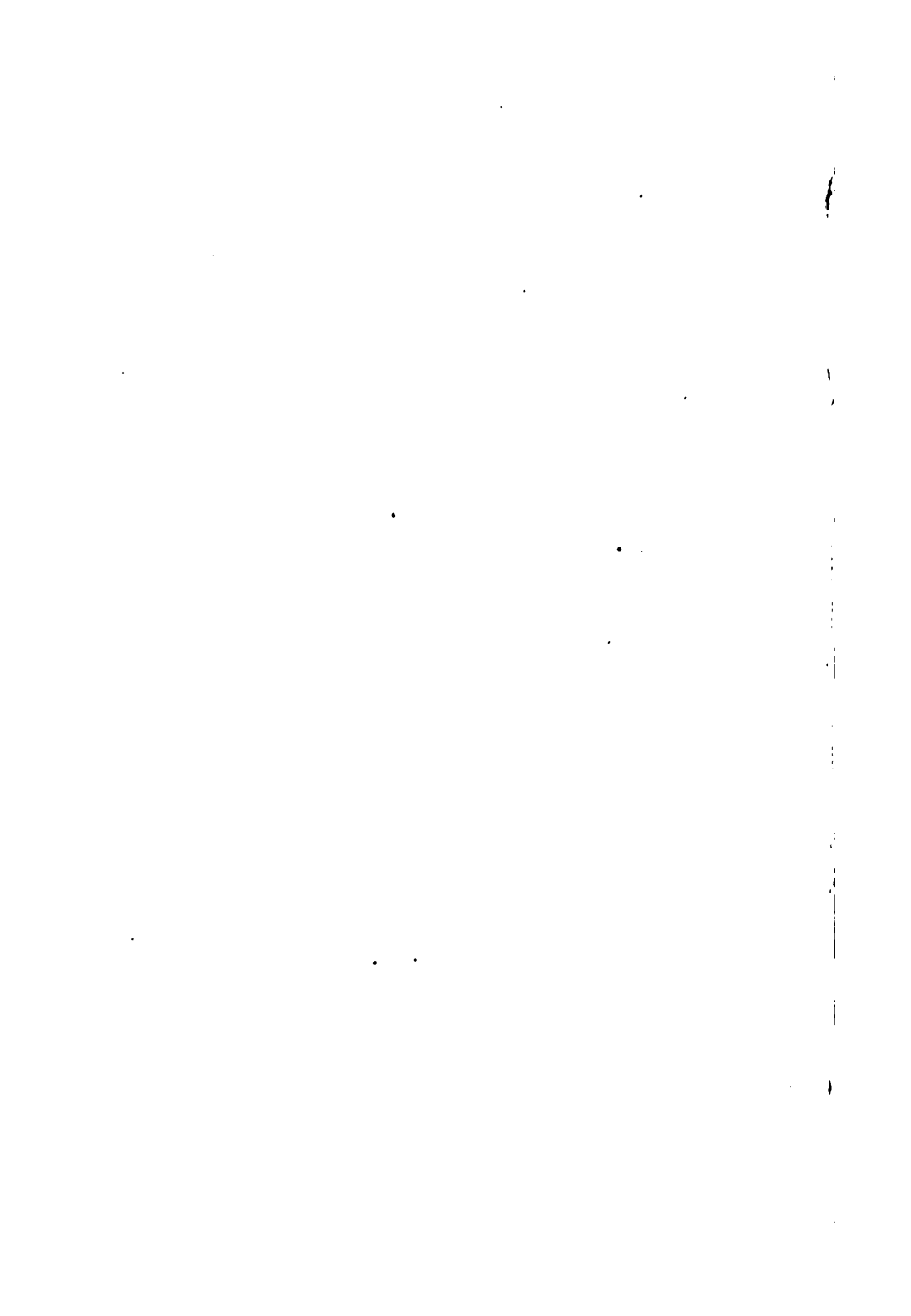
J. W. HERTY, Esq., M.D.,

OF GEORGIA, AMERICA,

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED BY

HIS SINCERE FRIEND,

FRANCIS DERRICK.



P R E F A C E.

IN bringing out a Second Edition of this romance, I deem it necessary to say a few words by way of preface. The critics who have done me the honour of reviewing my work blame the author for plunging his readers into dreamland, and leading them throughout the length of three volumes into all the mazes of an unreal world. This censure confirms me in the flattering belief that I have succeeded in the most difficult part of my task—that of concealing entirely the true author and the true world, and writing throughout with the dreamy pen of the somnambulist, Esther Treganowen.

To do this required a long-sustained effort, which I had humbly hoped would be understood and appreciated. But my reviewers have taken their stand on this very ground to plant their standard against me. Here, where I fancied lay my strength, they have espied only weakness. This is an unreal, an impossible story, they say; the author has painted shadows, or portrayed the tricks of a pantomime, or sketched the visions of some wild nightmare; there is no such world as that in which Esther lived, no such people as those who surrounded her.

Granted: to you and me, gentlemen, there is no such world—we, perchance, are “of the earth earthy;” but to the fervid imagination and the sick brain of the lonely somnambulist, the world was even wilder, more terrible, and dreamier than she has dared depict it. I, who have created Esther, know that, in writing, she often

restrained her pen, and checked the visions of a too exuberant fancy. Still it was always Esther who wrote. Had I, Francis Derrick, taken the tale into my hands, the "old sea Ogre" would have been a very commonplace ruffian; the "terrible sisters," ordinary old maids, full of family pride, superstition, and spite; Paul, in the grasp of policeman X, would be divested of all horror, and the Doctor no longer a presiding genius, a protecting Fate, the god of Jenifer's worship, glorious and good as angels are, but simply a mighty pleasant fellow, whom one would always be glad to see and sorry to part from. Thus in my hands would the shadowy phantoms that surround Esther loom out into substantial flesh and blood, and all the fabric of her unreal life fade like a castle in the air, letting the reader fall at once upon the hard world such as it really is.

Would this be a change for the better?

Or is it a fair and a pleasant experiment to write a romance without a bigamist and without a bankrupt—where crime in the pure imagination of an innocent girl loses its vileness, and invests itself instead with the wildness and the poetry of an old legend—where coarseness and sin, though they exist, never taint the atmosphere in which she lives, but shape themselves to her, like the avenging Fates or the terrible Nemesis of the Ancients, and she sees beauty, love, and justice, where harder eyes might behold only ugliness, hatred, and revenge?

Let us not forget that there *is* a world of beauty, of poetry, and of love, and to some natures this is a truer world than the world of the bankruptcy court, the police court, the divorce court, or any other court whatsoever; and it remains to us yet to prove whether *these* are not the visions and the other the reality.

And are we not beginning to tire of hard worldly stories, where meanness is heaped on meanness, and cunning meanders like an unsavoury stream through every page? I think so. I think there is a growing weariness in all hearts of such things; and the *coming* wave of literature will take us back to the wild legends of the Middle Ages, in which at least there are chivalry, honour, and truth, rather than join that tide whose waters, after a rapid flow, are now surely about to ebb.

This being my belief, I have chosen a heroine from a land of a thousand legends, where the old poetic faith in goblin and fairy still lingers, where spirits wander on mine and moor, and where even a ghost-layer is not a myth. For Thomas Flavell is not the creation of a fanciful brain; his tomb is to be seen in Mullion, and his fame still lives. Taking the shadowy figure of a young girl, and that girl a somnambulist, I

have endeavoured to transport myself into her ideal world, and to depict characters and events as they might appear to her innocent but vivid and troubled imagination. My pen, in this shadowy hand, has written, say my reviewers, not a novel, but a dream. I set aside the question as to whether the autobiography of a somnambulist—one of Celtic blood and poetic temperament from a legendary land—should be aught else, and I bow to their decree, not displeased that they have so named what is in truth but a vision. Yet I trust that to all our fair English girls, the world, in spite of sin and sorrow, may never appear harder and coarser than it did to Esther Treganowen. And while I told her history, I think I never forgot that I was relating the recollections of an English maiden, and not the reminiscences of a man of the world.

I cannot conclude these few words of preface without tendering my earnest

thanks to those gentlemen, who have on the whole so kindly, and favourably reviewed the work of an author, who is yet young in his vocation.

LONDON, 1866.

INTRODUCTION.

I AM asked by my daughter to write out the eventful history of my youth for the perusal of my grandchildren. I consent on two conditions. Firstly, I must not be found fault with if, in relating past events, I refer to them with the feelings of the present time. No young voice must cry out in criticism, Oh, you were only ten, twelve, fourteen, or whatever age it might be, when this happened; you could not have thought in such or such a way. To all these objections beforehand, I answer, Well, I am sixty-four now I am telling the story, and if in my narration of the incidents of my youth and

childhood there creep in, on hobbling gait, the wise saws and sad thoughts of age, I cannot help it. It is the fault of my years, not of my pen. I will promise you that I will often search back into my spirit, and gather up, if I can, those light clouds of fancy that children call thought. But I am old now, and I am not sure that I shall always succeed. The withered leaf at best is but a sad, mocking image of the same leaf in its fresh green spring. Perhaps I shall often give you such an image, and beguile myself with the fancy, that it is a garland from the rosy May of my youth.

Forgive me: I glance at my face in this glass standing on my table, and I see I am myself a withered leaf. I can show you, then, only the form of my life, not its freshness.

Moreover, the silken webs of thought are so fragile, and we grow so gradually from youth to age, that we know not when the

change began which transformed these gossamer threads of young fancy into strong cables of reason, or iron fetters of care. Then smile if you will if I sometimes present you with mature reflection, as the thought of a child, or if with unwitting hand I paint my portrait of a young girl with the wrinkles of an old woman.

Thus premising of my first condition, I open on my second.

It is that I must be allowed to tell my story my own way, and as it came to me piece by piece, year by year, until it grew into a whole. If then, it appears to you in the same broken shapes—here a picture, and there an imperfect utterance, a servant's tale, a child's dream, a night vision, coming and going like the shifting spectra of a kaleidoscope—you must pardon me; it was thus I gathered it up, and I can only relate it as it was painted upon my own mind in a series of strange pictures, one

often repeating the other, though drawn by another hand.

There is yet a reason why you must pardon me if the picture I am now about to paint—into which I work, as it were, all the broken, shifting scenes of which I speak—should not be as perfect as my imagination would fain make it. This reason I will not speak of here. It will come into my tale at its right place. It will come like a blank, and then you will find that such a blank sadly mars the web of a life, and is a chasm which the after-time can only rudely bridge over.

Thus bargaining for your kindness, I dip my pen in the ink, I turn back wistfully to the past, and beckon to the phantoms of the dead whose living forms then shone around me.

ESTHER TREGANOWEN.

MILDRED'S WEDDING.

CHAPTER I.

You have desired that I should begin with my earliest recollections. First memories are but pictures—photographs, as it were, on the brain, of the images presented to the unreasoning eye of infancy.

My first picture is in this sort. I remember it when any sudden or sultry heat oppresses me with faintness; then before my dimmed sense there rises a place of unnatural stillness, quivering with a vague tremor which is heat; and within this steaming atmosphere I see myself, a little child, bound upon a bed of pain by chains of weakness and languor that seem insuffer-

able. Overhead a large punkah waves with a jerking, restless sound that adds to the sense of stillness, with a monotony that beats painfully on the vexed ear. Over the little white cot I see a face bending—a soldierly face, with dark, passionate eyes, deep and grief-worn—a marked face that one recognises again after years of absence. And this face stoops over me, and there is a kiss laid on my brow from those full, nervous lips, and then the picture vanishes. There is no beginning to it, and no end; it comes and goes simply like that.

Thinking of it now, I know it must have been a long, weary illness that chained me beneath the swinging punkah, for my next picture looms out of a great blank—a darkness in which I see nothing. It comes upon my memory when the first breeze of the sea touches my face with new freshness after absence. Then, as the first dash of

the waters surges on my ear, as the first roll of the waves bounds on my sight, slowly, with a sense of relief from suffering, the picture gleams out of that darkness which was pain, and paints itself thus upon my mind. The deck of a ship, with many figures, much confusion, and a Babel of tongues, in the midst the little child of the white cot lying on a small couch ; a fresh breeze plays around her, and a feeling of rest like an angel's wing folds her about. An ayah is there attentive to every wish, and the tall gentleman with the marked, sorrowful face is there likewise. But I see the child's eyes fixed wistfully on a little rosy girl, lovely as a cherub, who plays, sings, dances in everybody's way, but is greeted by all with a kiss, a smile, or a loving word.

Suddenly there is a sharp cry of intense agony ; one, two men plunge into the sea, and the laughing vision, pale, wet, sense-

less, rises on me from amidst the waves, her little form held tightly in the arms of the soldier, whom I know to be my father. The frightened little one, beautiful in her paleness, is laid on the lap of a graceful lady, who has been sitting languidly opposite my couch. The child's streaming garments and wet hair drench and stain the lady's rich silk robe and embroidered shawl, but she takes no heed ; she kisses the child passionately and has no word of thanks for her deliverer. I see it all, and the first *thought* I can remember pierces my baby brain in the shape of a jealous pang, as by some subtle instinct I knew the lady would not thus take me on her lap, would not thus bend over and kiss me, if I were just rescued from death. Then the tall gentleman, drenched with sea-water, and pale but smiling, leans over me, and the first *voice* I can remember adds itself to sight, and involuntarily I join words to my picture.

"Why do you cry, Esther?"

"Because I thought you would be drowned, papa."

And swiftly a third feeling is associated with my vision—a consciousness of shyness, of secrecy, for this thought alone has not caused my tears.

Then the little girl, newly dressed, is brought to my couch, and I am bidden to kiss her, and say good-bye, and my father stands there wistfully looking on, his brow contracted, his deep eyes bent on mine. But the lady, holding the child tightly by the hand, stoops carelessly and kisses me; the little one, quick to copy her, presses her rosy mouth with equal lightness upon my cheek, and turns quietly away. They both go down the side of the ship into a gay boat awaiting them, and I, bursting into passionate tears, cry vainly, "Mamma! mamma!"

Then this picture vanishes too, coming

and going, without beginning, without end ; for I cannot tell you how I parted with my father, though I loved him best ; neither does the vision ever bring me the name of the little girl, nor tell me who she was.

My next memory glides upon me far out at sea. I am strong and rosy, jumping, running, dancing, never tired, and I am happy too, for I feel myself a favourite, smiled on by the captain, caressed by the crew, petted by the kind old lady taking me to England. This word "England" inspires me with some fear, but I dance and play it off till we land, and then a sudden silence and awe swallow up my memories grimly.

Like a stately picture out of a frame creeping coldly towards me, my first sight of Miss Admonitia returns with a start upon my brain. It comes with the slow tolling of a church bell ; it comes with a funereal march and sound of muffled drums ; it comes

at times if I wake suddenly at midnight and hear the iron stroke of time knelling the hour. Then like a ghost Miss Admonitia's shade glides clear out of all the broken images and shadows of the past, and lays her cold hand again upon me, while back to my heart rushes the sinking fear of the little child, newly landed on a strange shore, a stranger among strangers, gazing wistfully into the stately dark face standing among the crowd to claim her.

Not thus does any remembrance of her sister rise before me. As I sit thus in my quiet room, with these cut sheets of paper beneath my hand, and my pen pausing in mid-air, I try in vain to call before my memory the first impression of that pale shadowy figure.

No, I had no first impression of Miss Mildred. She stole upon me as the twilight steals upon the day; she gathered about me silently, as the shadows gather at evening.

till we start to see their pale, filmy forms creeping on every path, surrounding us coldly; thus she closed around me, till her power encompassed me about, and held possession of every avenue of my soul.

All that fevered time is past now; the hot yearning, the burning pain, the terrible agony of love and despair quenched in the bitter rain of tears, or deadened by the numbing hand of time, whose kindest cures we shrink from. And as I sit here, remembering with the calmness of old age these trials, this past anguish, looking back on them cheerfully through the long vista of years, I find there is no first picture left on my memory of Miss Mildred sufficiently clear and fixed for my pen to seize. No, all is dim, floating, unshaped, like the rolling mists in a shadowy land, and there is no image tangible and earthly enough to draw out in clear form upon my paper.

But if, sad and weary, I lie sleepless, with

window uncurtained, that I may look out upon the deep blue waters of our western sea—so dear to Cornish eyes—then, when I mark the moonlight clear, glittering, shimmering like a pale spirit over the waves in a sheen cold, unfathomable, beautiful, I think of Miss Mildred.

If in wood or tangled brake there glides noiselessly across my feet a grey cold viper, in the glitter of its loathsome beauty escaping my scrutiny, I think of Miss Mildred.

Beneath cathedral roof, where the tall pillars stand cold, pure, and stately, in dim religious light, if the pale shadow of some martyred saint, or suffering virgin in faded rose, with golden aureole dimmed and broken, fall across the white marble of a tomb, then, as I look at the meek unsubstantial image fading away before my view, its suffering once so real, now so unpitied, so silent, so unseen, I bow my head in prayer, and I think of Miss Mildred.

If by a sick bed I have watched death coming in relentless, silent strength, griping the writhing nerves, quenching the light in the loving eyes still turned warmly to life, and coldly stealing, breath by breath, the reluctant soul away, I have thought with a shudder of the pale woman whose story like a dark web is interwoven with my life.

Above all, in the cold dawn, at that hour which is rather night's death than the birth of day, when light hovers quiveringly over the earth, grey impalpable, like some strange spirit, uncertain of his path, and seeming to flee the sun rather than to be his harbinger and herald, I think with a remorseful pang of Mildred Tremaine, I recognise in this fleeing, fleeting spirit light her fittest emblem. Cold, unloved, pale, and chill, like her this earliest dawn is looked at shrinkingly, and though for every other hour in the rolling night and day we may find a

smile, yet this one we meet with a tear,
or turn from with a shudder.

Thus contradictory and strange are the
images that recal Miss Mildred to my
memory. And even thus in many colours,
contrasting the pure blue of love and faith
with the fiery red of hatred and revenge,
the tangled skein of her history will unwind
itself under my hand.

CHAPTER II.

It was a day of white rolling mists, palpable and wreathy as piled snow, when I landed at Falmouth. Shrinkingly my little feet walked up the slippery granite steps of the pier, but as I reached the top a tall black figure emerged from the mist, and a cold hand, stretching forward, grasped my quivering fingers. There was no voice nor speech in this action, but I knew that this figure, like my fate, was watching for me; for months, as the ship beat the waves, this hand had been waiting for me, these proud hard eyes had marked her course, these rigid lips had counted the days till her arrival. And as the jerk of the oars brought my little bark through the wall of wreathed

cloud, and I loomed out of the misty sea, and she from the misty land, we knew each other, and our two figures needed no words of recognition as we clasped hands in silence.

Thus, on the sea-shore, beneath the cliffs of Pendennis, white-wreathed, cloud-covered, and vapoury, did Miss Admonitia and I meet for the first time.

As she gripped my hand, it appeared to me as though the waves had brought me helplessly to her feet. And since, in my desultory readings, lighting upon stories of water-spirits, I have compared myself to one of these, lost in a misty sea, and fate-driven, wandering hither and thither through the cloud-wall, till from without the treacherous wreathed vapours the dreaded land looms deadly, and the fainting Undine is clutched by the cold hand of the ungenial earthly gnome who is to hold her in thrall through many vexed years, till in the yearning me-

mory the lore and the love of the sea come but as an unknown light, a craving instinct, or a gnawing pain.

I remember our departure from Falmouth in an old lumbering carriage drawn by four horses. I remember driving through narrow lanes between hedges honeysuckle laden, and emerging on the wide downs golden with yellow gorse; but of my arrival at the old mansion of Treval I recollect nothing.

It seemed to me that I *awoke* there after a long sleep—a sleep which had fallen on me in some other land which I could only dimly remember. But I soon got to know the old mansion from roof-top to cellar. How distinctly it rises before my memory now! I could count every window in it, and tell you the names of its twenty-three bedrooms. And yet it is more than half a century ago since my child-shadow haunted it, since that tiny phantom with sunny hair

—I can scarcely believe it was myself—wandered alone through its ghostly corridors, waking up the echoes with dancing step, timid song, and rarer laughter.

A grey old shadowy mansion, lying embowered amid its ancient trees, standing in stately strength around it like a giant guard. Huge shadows of gnarled branches and rugged trunks lay on its sunny lawn, stretching out at sunset like grey phantom arms, embracing roof and window, and tower.

Very pleasant was it for me as a child to lie in the summer time on the grass, and watch these shadows as they crept onwards and upwards over the glittering western front. Then the windows in the setting sun sparkled with purple, gold and crimson, flashing out their colours on the grey, time-worn granite, while the sculptured cornices of grinning imp or smiling cherub, and the old grim heraldic griffins keeping watch and

ward above each window, grew alive in the glow, and peeped and muttered, whispering to the child-watcher below of the secret and evil deeds done in the stilly rooms, within which their cruel, impish, stone faces peered wickedly in the quickening light. Then upwards, upwards crept the long shadows, striking each stone face dead as they touched it, till every purple window died out into leaden paleness, the griffins grew stiff and cold, the smiling angels battered, and worn, and sorrowful, helpless now to cheer or comfort, and the imps alone kept their cruel leer, and with furtive glance in the gathering darkness, peered down maliciously on the frightened child, holding her little mantle around her, creeping wistfully towards the portal, a troubled ocean of thought, of poesy, of fear, surging round her fluttering heart.

When winter came, the stone faces in grey coldness looked out upon a drear land-

scape of heath and moor, with golden patches of yellow gorse shining like some wintry fire amid bare glistening rocks of granite upheaved in giant confusion, like the mighty ruins of some great city crumbled in an earthquake, or at times deceiving the eye in fantastic shapes emulating humanity, glaring back at the carved masks with faces stonier and mightier than theirs. Here a profile in ghastly distinctness, with beard of clustered heath, and hair of tufted fern, there a full face with beetling brows, shadowed by young pine, and hair on end with horror, while a frightful scar ran hideous across the stony cheek, and, distorting the bearded lips of hairy moss, showed the great granite teeth within.

Close by the western front stood a huge cedar, that had seen a thousand years go by, and had watched the cunning hands beneath whose skill the stone faces lived and grew, while even before the cedar was, these

mightier faces cut on the grey moor had lain still and quiet in their stony strength, mocking at the works of man. Seated high up amid the branches of this great tree, with some book of wild romance or poesy in my hand, I watched through many an hour of the day, shaping the clouds into armies, making the long roll of fleecy smoke sweeping from the hidden artillery, and shouting with delight, or holding my breath in silent awe, when a slanting ray of the winter sun shot forth like a flashing spear or javelin. And sometimes the rolling ranks opened, and the king in a chariot of glittering silver came forth from the distant blue, warriors stood around him in wreathed and sable darkness, banners fluttered, and flags unfurled. Then the driving winds arose, and the serried ranks were rent in twain, as with flames of fire and a clash of thunder the captain of the opposing host came stately forth to meet the king. Now rank rushed

on rank, and in a tempest of pelting hail, sleet, or rain I left my cloudy warriors direfully mingled in the din and storm of battle.

Oftener I liked to watch the stony faces on the wall, and, filled with imaginings of their dire hate of children, I set the colder faces on the moor in array against them. Slowly, ponderously, I brought the huge giants from their heathy bed, and marshalled them on the sloping lawn before the western front.

"Now!" I cried, and at the sound of my voice each granite hand uplifted struck its blow, and not the stony faces only, but the whole mansion, crumbled into dust, and I, a little houseless child, shivered among the cedar leaves, and wondered at my work.

Then, looking up, I saw the cruel griffins and the wicked elves all gazing at me with a cold wonder too, and a newer hate in their hard eyes, that I, a puny child, not of their

blood—for the ancient race that wore the griffin had long died out—should dare to bring a battle array of phantoms against them to do them hurt. And I covered my eyes with my hand, or shut out their angry faces with the fluttering cedar leaves, or, jumping down from my wintry nest, I tried to play and forget my fancies.

But there were things in that house that would not let me play or be a child like other children. There were strange whispers floated about in those long corridors; and in the lofty rooms with their high ceilings and their tall windows footsteps echoed whose *living* tread nor I nor any had ever heard.

There was one shadow, too, that came and went with a great pain upon its face as it flitted by—a pain before which I shrank and cowered. And not daring to whisper of that unearthly woe to any human being, I told it to the cedar leaves, and they

whispered it back to the winds, like the old classic fable of the rushes and the king's secret. It was only from the cedar I saw this face, and we watched it together and kept our secret well, for the wind's voice among its branches passed unheeded by all ears save mine. I had to clamber high up into the old tree, and peer and watch it might be the whole day long, before it came, perchance once, perchance twice, like a pale ghost hurrying across the white wall opposite and then vanishing.

I cared more for this fleeting vision than for the fighting armies of the sky, or my granite warriors supine, stupendous on the heath, or even for the stony faces, who were too strong for me I knew, and who hated me as an alien, living, sleeping, in rooms belonging to *their* dead whom they had loved and watched over. So day after day I climbed the cedar tree, and gazed in a longing that was half fear at the white

blank wall visible through the closed window. And then my heart stood still, as creeping, gliding over it came that long, sharp profile I had learned to know so well. Straight up and straight down, no change in the attitude, no change in the fixed pain of its terrible face, it passed up and down the wall.

I tried to see it from another place, but I climbed in vain the great laburnum, the flowering thorn, and the old lime tree, all of which stood near the cedar. From these the window presented only a blank aspect in which no mystery mingled. Thus it was that after many trials I found that from the cedar only, I gained a sight of this white wall and its creeping shadow. So there I sat silent as the days went by me, sinking softly one by one into the western sea, like shining sands dropping, ever dropping, from the hour-glass of time into the ocean of eternity.

And the hurrying cloud spirits looked down on me as I kept watch, and the stately rock phantoms gazed across the moor in calm watchfulness, one figure with granite hand uplifted and clenched, save for the index finger which seemed to point in unchanging fixedness to the window above the cedar tree.

What was it pointing at, I wondered, and what were the stone faces saying as they whispered together in the chilly air?

In vain I strove to pierce the secret of their mystic voices; in vain I watched the window and the white blank wall within, on which there flitted once, twice in a week the thin profile with its haggard look of woe. It told me nothing; the faces told me nothing, the granite hand pointing from the heath told me nothing, and yet all spoke in some sorrowful, hidden, unuttered language that stirred within me a strange awe. I felt as though possessed by a spirit

who had come to me from many wanderings grief-laden and weary, but unable to speak in human words, he vainly strove to teach me his unknown tongue, and failing, succeeded only in touching my heart continually and sorrowfully with his sorrows, mutely, dimly filling it with a sense of his wrongs. The cedar leaves, the cloudy sky, the granite giants upon the heath, the stone faces, and the sharp profile on the blank wall were all trying to be his interpreters, I fancied.

As I pursued the simile, the spirit would seem to me to grow into myself. Thus did I live ; thus uncomprehended, sad, and lonely was my child life at Treval. No love, no kind words, no demonstrative fondness unlocked with sweet caress my trembling speech. Miss Mildred and her sister, Miss Admonitia Tremaine, were ever to me stately, cold, and proud as these stone faces. Then warm memories of my father and the

glowing land I had left came to me with tears, and raised a hot yearning in my heart for a tenderer love than their chill, forced kindness knew how to give.

As time went on and the years passed slowly by, I grew more and more lonely and strange, till at last, running wild and unnoticed amid the stores of a great library, and wandering up and down in that old house listening to the legends told of its haunted rooms, or traversing alone the tangled walks and dark alleys of its great garden and park, what wonder that I became morbid and fanciful?

Still that profile on the wall was not altogether a fancy, and again and again I climbed the cedar to watch for it, till, in the pale sunshine of one short November day, as it came gliding in its old monotonous fixed way along the blank wall, I set myself to think steadfastly about it.

"How long is it ago since I first noticed it?" I asked myself.

I could answer—I could fix on the bright day in spring when the shadow of that white, terrible face had first caught my eye. I could see again on the lawn the bright shower of gold falling from the laburnum, the heavy bunches of lilac perfuming the air, the rose-pearl blossoms of the hawthorn drifting away like scented snow before the breeze; and I could feel again the cloud, the gloom, the sudden winter that pale face brought upon me in the midst of the spring sunshine. I could remember this, but I could not tell how many years I had been at Treval when it happened.

"Through two summers and one winter," said I, thoughtfully, "I have watched this phantom without speaking of it and without seeking to penetrate its secret. I am older now, and I will find out what the thing is. Firstly, *where* is that window?"

I clasped my hands with a sudden thought like an inspiration.

I would count the windows outside on the western front, and then I would count them again from the rooms within, and see if the number tallied.

CHAPTER III.

I SET to work immediately, and found there were twenty-two windows in all, six on the centre projection—the house being of Tudor architecture, and built in the peculiar form of that time, with the middle portion slightly in advance of the rest—and eight on each side, of which six were on the depressed or flat portion of the front, and two on the advanced or projecting portions at the ends. These two—or, rather, four windows, if we count both ends—were of great size and height. They had been altered without taking from them their ancient character, and they now stretched to the whole height of the house, an intermediate story having evidently been sacrificed to render the rooms

in these wings of a lofty and fitting proportion. On the ground floor these apartments consisted of the drawing-room and library, the intervening windows lighting the dining and breakfast rooms, and a second drawing-room, lighted by the two narrow windows in the centre division of the front.

Above each window, with the exception of the four larger and less ancient ones of which I have spoken, the heraldic griffin kept watch and ward. Below the griffins, at the corner of each casement, peered the stony imps, with starting eyeballs and malignant leer; midway down were the winged cherubs; while at the base the imp was reproduced with the addition of an heraldic shield held up between two gauntleted hands, while beneath the middle windows ran a carved stone motto mingled with Gothic tracery, and the repetition of the letter L cut in many quaint ways.

This letter was said to represent Lancaster, the builder of the house being a stalwart baron in the Wars of the Roses, and triumphant and enriched by the victory of his party at the accession of Henry, the first Tudor, he perpetuated his Lancastrian prejudices by the repetition of this initial, accompanied by the red rose, which met you on mantelpiece and panel in many a quaint garland at every turn in the old house.

The four large and more modern windows had no griffins, no letter L, and no motto. The architect had done his best to imitate the carved mullions, with their impish and cherub heads, but he had not attempted to copy faithfully the other devices.

As though it were yesterday, I remember the fitful day—now cloudy, now 'sunny—in November on which I first marked all this, while I counted and recounted the number of windows, and the rooms to which they belonged. I knew them all, for I was free

to run in and out, and to and fro, in the house as I would. It was easy to count the windows of the great drawing-room, and the panelled dining-room, with its mysterious door behind the shutter opening with a spring, divulging a narrow staircase, dark, winding, and hung with cobwebs, down which I had never ventured, but which report said led to an underground apartment, whence secret staircases conducted to every part of the house. I knew afterwards all this was false, but then I knew also that Miss Mildred's story was false likewise, when she said that these stairs led only to a small cellar, in which, in the old drunken days of England, the wine to be consumed in a drinking-bout was stored away to be conveniently near the roysterers.

The long, narrow tapestried drawing-room came next, with its two Gothic windows on the western front, and its strangely-

modern bay window at the opposite end, looking out on a plot of grass and flowers called the Bees' Nest, because here was nestled a row of hives beneath syringa-trees, on which the morning sun shone brightly both in summer and winter. Next came the breakfast-room—rather small, though nobly lighted—and lastly, the great library, with its huge window to match the drawing-room.

There was no need, then, to puzzle myself much with these; but in the upper stories the number of windows appertaining to bedrooms, staircases, and closets made a confusion in my mind which rendered it impossible for me to fix on the room to which the window opposite the cedar belonged.

Slowly I crept down from the tree, and, entering the house by a small door on the south side—for the great state doors on the north, for some reason, were never opened—I ran up the great staircase, and

going from room to room, and from closet to closet, I gazed from each window down upon my seat in the cedar.

No one slept in these desolate rooms through which I crept so thoughtfully, and the huge beds, with their heavy drapery, looked sepulchral. This part of the house was only kept up for show now, as the family saw no company, and the only one who inhabited a room on this side was Miss Mildred, with her old servant Martha, who slept in a little chair-bed by her side. Some thought it strange they should sleep in this wing of the mansion alone, but they never seemed to be afraid.

I was sure, then, of meeting no one as I continued my search, so I went on slowly through the long corridor, pondering strangely as I laid my hand in succession on each lock. I found none fastened. Door by door I opened them softly, pausing for a moment each time before, with a long-held

breath, I ventured within. I began at the end farthest from the cedar tree, and as, window by window, I drew nearer to it, I paused longer at the door, and my hand trembled and my breath came shorter. But even when so near that, as I stepped within the threshold, I closed my eyes, fearing that woful face would shine upon me from the white wall opposite, still there was nothing—always nothing. In every room a stately bed, heavy with cornice, tester, and curtains; some old carved furniture; a thick faded carpet; a portrait or two, pallid and cracked, or some framed bits of needle-work, with silks all dusty and yellow, like the dead hand that wrought them; and the glinting sunshine, quivering in pale and feeble ray; but nothing more. No shadow of life—no white wobegone face passing by the wall with restless motion, like madness. No—none of this; and it was something like this I had come to see.

I had opened every window and leaned out from each, relieved, yet strangely disappointed, when suddenly, as I was slowly counting over the long line I had passed, I perceived with a strange chill and awe that I had visited every room save the bedroom and sitting-room of the sisters. I have explained that the centre of the western front consisted of three stories, while the sides or projecting wings only possessed two, the rooms here having been heightened and the windows enlarged. Over the drawing-room thus heightened was the large state bedroom, where King Charles II. slept when on his way to Falmouth, whence he embarked for Holland. At the other end, over the library, was the pleasant sitting-room of the sisters, where they sat all day, save when they descended to a sunny room on the south side to receive their rare visitors. No one living was admitted to them here. Indeed, it was rarely

that even I entered this sitting-room of theirs. I mostly ran wild, going hither and thither as I pleased, no one restraining me after my morning governess—the curate's sister—and my tutor had departed, and no one seeking to be a companion of my lonely ways. Now, however, I ran towards this room with a swift and eager step, and my heart beat fast as I tapped at the door.

“Who is it? what do you want?” asked Miss Mildred.

What did I want? I stood still with fear, and turned pale as I echoed the words. I knew that I lived in a world of my own, of which these two maiden sisters guessed nothing. I knew that I raised up phantoms and made spirits come and go at my bidding. And now was I to confess these things? Was I to lay bare the most cherished secrets of my imagination, and show these strange, chill companions of mine to minds who could not understand

me? Instinctively I shrank from the thought, and releasing the handle of the door, which I held in my small cold hand, I fled away to some quiet nook where I could think by myself.

Mildred's clear calm voice pursued me.
"What did I want?"

I leaned my head on my clasped hands, and distinctly, like a painful quiver of light, the answer came into my brain.

I wanted to understand what I had seen—I wanted to seize this my last and deadliest phantom with a tangible grasp, and settle at once and for ever whether it was something real, or whether it belonged to the cloud shapes that too often haunted my fevered, lonely imagination.

Could I say this to the pale Miss Mildred, ever lost in prayer, macerating herself with fasts, and fearful of sinning if she spoke above her breath? Could I dare say it to the hard, stern, proud Miss Admonitia,

whose white face flushed so sullen red if aught was whispered before her that seemed to touch the family dignity ?

What ! should I presume to say I had seen shadows, phantoms, a ghastly face, coming and going in restless woe, on a wall in *her* house—the old, stately house that had stood in honour unblemished these three hundred years ?

No, I dared not do it. She would tell me I was mad; and Miss Mildred, with meek eyes, would say I was wicked, and would bid me go fast and pray.

My governess, should I tell her ? Again my head fell down on my clasped hands as I turned over this question in my mind, and again my heart said no.

She would say it was all imagination, the morbid fancy of a girl with a sickly mind, who loved dreamy idleness and selfish, phantom-haunted moods of silence before all cheerful talk, work, or play. And I trembled

as I thought of a consultation between her and the sisters over my moral health, and the remedy they might suggest to cure me. I was in their hands—my father, my mother, thousands of miles away—they could send me to a cruel school, or shut me up in one room, in prison if they liked. All my pulses fluttered and my limbs drooped like a caged bird's as I thought of this, and felt that I was only a weak, wretched little child, helpless as an orphan. I had better be silent, and keep free, even if my teeming brain drove me crazy, or my bursting heart broke in the struggle.

Thus thinking, I cried long and silently—self-pitying, luxurious tears, whose selfishness in after-years I learned to blush for.

I was sitting on nearly the top stair of a lonely flight that led to the highest garret, and now, resting my head on the step above me, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN I awoke, a long trail of purple glory was falling across me from a small western window, against which the setting sun was flashing golden. A sudden longing seized me to be out in the air—to be somewhere away from those long lines of shining dust, gold-sprinkled by the sun, but quivering to me with a thousand impish shapes—spinning, twirling, dancing, mocking, and making gibes at my flushed cheeks, tear-stained and fevered. How should I get away? Where reach the free breath of heaven, and escape these hideous fancies?

I started up as I remembered I was close by the long, narrow black door, behind which stood a steep flight of steps—or,

rather, a ladder—leading to the roof. In a moment I had this door open, and stood hesitatingly on the threshold. It was not that I was afraid; I had climbed those steps a hundred times before, and knew well the trick of the trap-door at the top, through which I should clamber out on the great lead roof and revel in the wind and the setting sunshine. It was not fear, but an undefinable presentiment—a superstition, if you will—that turned me icy cold, and impelled me forward even while it repulsed me.

I stepped within the door, and had mounted two or three of the steep rings of the ladder, when something white and fluttering caught my view, moving in the distant darkness.

Let me explain and make clear, if I can, the position in which I found myself. Firstly, the door, which was exceedingly high and narrow, and from some fantasy

painted black, opened outwards, thereby darkening the light from the small window I have spoken of. It stood on the top of two steps, which were on the right of the lonely flight where I had fallen asleep. Immediately opposite was the door leading to the garret corridor, or topmost gallery of the house, on the left hand of which a heavy railing protected you from the whole depth of the great staircase, down which you looked giddily. Beneath, on the same hand—that is, opposite—were two galleries, one above another, with their long range of doors; while on your right in this gallery stood the doors of four garret bedrooms; and at the end, opposite the door by which you entered, was a lumber closet. I name all this that you may understand that no thing ungifted with wings could reach the narrow black door leading to the roof unless it passed up the flight of stairs on which I lay sleeping.

At this hour there was not a soul in the garrets or in the closet. Who or what, then, had passed me as I lay there in the slanting sunshine?

I asked myself this question with a beating heart as I stood on the ring of the ladder and watched this white fluttering thing creeping along with an uncertain movement. Suddenly, round a sharp angle, it disappeared, and I instantly, moved by curiosity, determined to follow it.

Once more I find myself obliged to give you a distinct detail of the place, in order that you may follow me clearly in this history.

The ladder stood directly inside the door, to the right as you entered. On that same side was a wall close against you; on the left, a rude balustrade of rope protected you as you climbed. Beyond, on this left side, stretched a great open space or chamber, without flooring, and without

other ceiling than the slates and rafters. This vast place, stretching beneath the roof over all the southern front, received no light save such stray beams as struggled through the slates. To the right, beyond the wall, a narrow, tortuous passage led to a similar space over the chambers of the western front. By crossing from beam to beam it was thus possible to traverse the whole of these two sides of the house; but on the north this space beneath the roof had been turned into garrets and other offices.

The distinct light from the door, clearly defined in a sharp, well-cut figure behind me, scarcely penetrated far into the gloom, yet as I stood thus on the third or fourth ring of the ladder, I had plainly seen this fluttering thing creeping towards me. Suddenly, as I have said, it disappeared round the angle of the wall, and it was then I determined to follow it. Descending the

ladder rapidly, I made my way with ease across the beams till I reached this angle; here all light from the door ceased to penetrate, and I found myself plunged in thick darkness. I was at the entrance of the twisting passage of which I have spoken. I had never yet ventured through this place, and I stood now a moment hesitating as to what I should do. I remembered that about six month ago I had been sitting in a room at the south-west corner with our sempstress, when we were both startled by the apparition of a buckled shoe and shapely calf dangling from the ceiling, wagging frantically to and fro, to the detriment of lath and plaster, as it endeavoured to free itself and join its attending body above. This leg belonged to our footman, Timothy Pryor, a man of an exploring and enterprising disposition, who with a lantern had set out on a voyage of discovery round this very corner, and

had come to grief prematurely by placing his foot on the ceiling instead of on a beam. I recollect the dire anger of Miss Admonitia when she heard of it, and remembered she had alleged as her chief reason for forbidding all further explorations, that the explorer ran a chance of being killed if both feet slipped, and he fell through to the floor beneath. Now, I dreaded Miss Admonitia's anger, and I had no fancy for being killed; thus I stood a moment at the entrance of the passage—the footman's history, which it has taken so many words to tell, flashing through my mind in an instant.

An instant more I gave to a vain longing for a candle, and then I had turned the sharp angle, and in pitch darkness was groping my way on. I knew by the warmth on my right hand that the wall against which I was creeping was that of the great group of chimneys which stood at the south-west corner of the mansion, and, pressing the

palms of my hands against the wall, I felt with my feet for the beams, and got on slowly but safely. But when the wall first failed me, and my groping hand pressed only the air, I had nearly fallen, and only saved myself by going on my hands and knees. In this position I remained a moment to consider what I should do, and at the same instant the creeping, indistinct mass I had seen from the ladder fluttered by near me. I started up with a low cry, and attempted to follow rapidly, but the darkness and danger of the route hindered me. I don't know that I was afraid. Looking back on that time now, I think I can safely say it was more a feeling of burning curiosity than any other which possessed me—a strange curiosity made up of many feelings; mysterious longings to know somewhat of the unseen world; an impatient, fevered desire to gauge the truth of my many phantoms, and decide, once for all, whether they pos-

sessed a tangible existence, or were mere creatures of my brain—a dread whether they should indeed be the last, forcing upon me the conviction that a species of madness was seizing me—a madness spectre-haunted and terrible, before which I shuddered.

If any terror drove me on, it was this terror, as I felt I could bear to face this white creeping horror in front of me, and seize it, and tear from it its worst secret, rather than, by leaving it unexamined, let the thought of it seethe in my brain till I should scarcely know whether it was the spectre of a heated imagination, or a reality perceived by my sane eyesight. I pressed my hand against my forehead as there came steaming through my thoughts a legion of old stories, dreams, portents, which bore some relation to my present position; and a resolve came over me with the fierceness of fire to prove to myself that I was of sound reason when I saw this thing, or else to re-

nounce for ever the dangerous reading and reveries which led me into this course of thought.

I dashed on recklessly in the painful darkness, but had scarcely taken a dozen steps before I fell. As I rose again, very little hurt, I fancied the creeping white horror I was pursuing had stopped a moment as if to listen. I even fancied it had half turned, and a shape like a head had looked at me.

The light came faintly and rarely through the heavy slates of the roof, scarcely even to eyes accustomed to the darkness, enabling them to see the beams on which it was requisite to tread. I determined then to *crawl* instead of walk, and feeling the beams with my hands as I went, I got on much faster. I began to gain on the phantom, when a new thought suddenly struck me still, overwhelming me with a tide of changed feeling.

It was a *human being* I was pursuing, and it was crawling like myself. This was the uncertain hideous notion that had first appalled me, but now as I approached nearer it was evident the movement was that of a person on her knees. I say *her* knees, for the mass was too floating and draped for a man.

"Stop!" I screamed, as I clung with both hands to the beam on which I was resting.

My voice came back to me in a dreary echo dust-laden, but the thing I was pursuing hurried on faster.

"It shall not baffle me," said I aloud, as I set my teeth fiercely together and tried by the sound of my own voice to drown the loud beating of my heart.

Anger was added now to my other feelings, and I sped on with a swiftness I could scarcely have believed possible. I had all the courage of my race; a stupid servant

playing me a trick or a thief hiding should find I was no coward.

I went on in blind, mad haste ; but with all my efforts I could not go with the *directness* of this creeping woman—if woman it were. She went with a certainty, a knowledge of her way, if I may so express it, which baffled my superior speed. Still I began to gain on her ; I put out my hand ; I nearly touched her garment.

“Stop, demon ! thief ! murderess !” I cried, almost beside myself.

There was no reply save by a sudden start—a rustle as of some one in amazed and sharp fear, and then a rapid bound removed her several feet from me.

Again I shrieked out to her to stop, and then I dashed on so madly that, not perceiving a second wall in front, I struck my head with a sounding blow against it and fell forward heavily. For a moment I was stunned ; then rising, I perceived the figure

had stopped at some little distance beyond the wall; its head was turned towards me, and in a faint glimmer of light which shone around it I saw the face of my worst phantom—the face I had that day sought in every room, the dreadful wobegone face for which I had watched so often in the cedar tree.

Transfixed in horror I gazed at it, while in its dead-white, haggard aspect no consciousness glimmered of my look, yet at a slight movement I made it bounded away again, and disappeared so suddenly that its vanishing had for me a greater terror than its appearance.

For a moment I could not follow. I trembled in every limb and a deathly sickness overpowered me, but conquering this by a great effort, I felt my way along the wall till I reached the angle; here I perceived a narrow passage like the one I had passed at the opposite end. And through

this came the faint light, like a narrow line, a pointed lance, a spirit finger in the glimmer of which I had seen the face. As I entered this passage something white came fluttering towards me. I stood right in its way and seized it as it passed. Holding it tightly against me with both hands, I felt that it was paper—immense sheets of peculiar paper, thin but coarse. I clenched it all tightly and gasped for breath.

Some cold wind was blowing on me, which brought strength and courage into that dark, dusty atmosphere, and drove away all my faintness. A few steps more and I had cleared the passage and stood dazzled in a blaze of light streaming from an open window in the roof.

CHAPTER V.

WITH what thankfulness I rushed to that little casement, and leaning far out, breathed the fresh air, and inhaled the beauty of the glorious prospect without, I can never forget. O what a contrast to the stifling dust, terror, and darkness around me a moment ago ! There was the fair green lawn with its noble groups of trees ; there the moor with its patches of golden fire, its granite heads, and limbs of broken giants ; and beyond glimmered a faint white line which I knew to be a roll of breakers dashing over a low reef, out in the dancing, fetterless sea. The breeze from the boundless Atlantic blew freshly over me, and, rejoicing in the pure air, I ceased for a moment to think of the darkness and the phantom behind me.

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Then I turned nervously, and examined the spot where I found myself. I was evidently at the extreme north-west corner of the roof. Inside this wall, on one side, were the attics of the north front, but there was no door of communication between them and this place, though there had evidently been an intention of turning it into a garret chamber, else why this window, and these boards rudely laid down for flooring? In the great wall of chimneys was pierced a small hole, as for a grate, and on the western side was a niche, shelved, and laden with dusty books and papers. I examined all this with a hasty but searching glance, and nowhere could I see an outlet for escape save in the open window. By this way, then, my phantom had departed, and again I determined to follow.

Do not let me startle you. Remember, I was a country child, wild and free as a deer, and I lived in the wildest part of England,

where the great boundless ocean, and the wide waste moors gave to its people a freedom of thought, and action unknown to the inhabitants of inland trimly-cut landscapes. Some, then, might have turned giddy at the thought; but I was a fearless climber, and had often clambered over rocks and precipices where many men would not have cared to follow. Moreover, the roof was a favourite spot of mine. Many an hour had I spent on the leads, and once I had frightened even the brave Miss Admonitia by appearing like a tiny speck behind one of the Gothic pinnacles, and shouting to her when she was on the lawn. To attain this I had left the leads and clambered down the slates. And here I must explain that only one portion of the roof possessed leads—that is, the part which tradition said had been altered when the new staircase was built, and the drawing-room and library heightened. On the whole, the Tudor appearance of the house was well

preserved by the pinnacles and high roof which concealed the flat platform of lead behind it.

I am vexed I am obliged to interrupt my narrative with these descriptions, but without them you could not understand my story.

I proceed to say that you must not think of me as you would of other girls of my age. Think that I could ride and row like a boy, and climb trees and cliffs like a cat, and then you will not shudder when I tell you I boldly launched myself from the slanting casement on to the roof, and in two minutes had gained the leads safely.

I may truly say, at this time of my life—I was a little past thirteen—I feared nothing upon earth but ghosts, and these certainly were always pursuing me. Fearlessly I had turned my head and contemplated the giddy height at which I hung when clinging by my hands to the casement; but now that I

was on the roof, and the delicious air of sunset blew freshly on my flushed cheeks and hot, dusty hands, I feared to open my eyes lest that ghastly dead-white face should meet them. A moment of this shrinking terror, and then I had searched all round with anxious glance, to find—nothing. All was bare. Here were the naked leads, the great piles of chimneys, the carved pinnacles, and long shadows of sunset, myself, and solitude—nothing more. The wind blew with glorious freedom around me, dashing my long hair about my cheeks, the sun was fast setting, and a mist was coming in from the sea. I felt that I must sit down somewhere quietly, and think over this strange thing, for now I was conscious of feeling wildly—almost crazily—and I wanted to calm myself and come to some decision in my own mind about it.

I sought out my accustomed spot in the loo—as the Cornish call a shelter—of the

great chimney-pile. Here I found the piece of cake, yellow with saffron, which I had left behind me when I was last here a week ago; and I smiled at myself to think what a child I was then. I felt now I should never be a child again. Then, looking dreamily out upon the sea, I began to think, and my thoughts shaped themselves thus:—

All the visions I had had, the fairies, pixies, spirits I had seen, the spectres that had followed me, were of my own seeking. I had called them to me, and had experienced a shrinking pleasure, a delicious awe, in their presence. But this was a phantom of another shape—this I had *not* called. It had a reality about it unknown to me before—a reality and yet a deathliness that had first struck me when I watched it from the cedar tree in its monotonous passage up and down the blank wall. But there it had been only a shadow, a profile; here it

had come to me like a face in substance, though with the hue and pallor of death.

At this time I had never read of instances where the mind confuses reality with imagination till at length the line is passed which divides reason from insanity. I had never heard then of the painter who placed his sitters in their chairs, and continued their portraits long after they had left his studio.

For how long he did this safely none can tell, but at last his mind confused the imaginary sittings with the real, and he spoke to patrons of having had their parents, their children, in his studio when they were hundreds of miles away. He spoke of having had them when, alas! they were dead and buried. He shook hands with friends, and thanked them for their long sittings given him but yesterday, when they had not seen his face for months. And then the end came, and an asylum swallowed up his inno-

cent, useful life for twenty years.* Had I read of such things, a new terror would have stirred me ; but, as it was, the doubt that tormented me was this :—

Had I called the Devil to me by wild aspirations towards the spirit world ? By my fantastic imaginings of ghosts had I raised a real one, and was I to be for ever tormented by this creature, like those demon-haunted men of whom I had read, who wandered haggard through the world, fleeing vainly their curse ? Was I lost and wicked ? Had I given myself over to Satan in following the wanderings of my wild imagination, and revelling free in the thousand thousand visions that rose fantastic at my call ? Was it a deadly sin to do this, and was this phantom-horror my punishment ? Or did other children do the same ?—did they think as I thought, feel as I felt, and

* Related in Dr. Wigan's work on the "Duality of the Mind."

see sometimes, too, such things as these? And was it no *harm* to see them?

I looked out upon the darkening sky and the white line of breakers in the sea with pondering eyes, but no answer came to my questions. What did I know of other children? There was only little Tom Pengrath, who weeded the flower-beds, whom I could ask, and he knew nothing. I had tried him many times, and never found anything but emptiness and greediness—an insatiable appetite for currant-cake, halfpence, and twine: nothing more in him.

Other children had their fathers and mothers to ask, and then, if it was wicked to think such strange things as I thought, a mother would tell her daughter, and they would pray together, and God would forgive this sin of ignorance; and if some evil spirit in horrible shape like this phantom-woman came ever crouching, creeping near the

child, He whom unclean spirits dared not disobey would drive the haunting horror away.

“O mother, mother!” I cried in my agony, “why are you so far away from your child?”

Then I knelt down to pray, with my face towards the setting sun, and, while the tears streamed from my eyes, I implored that my father or mother might be sent to me, or that some good man who could exorcise evil spirits might come miraculously to my aid.

Do the young faces smile here for whom I am writing? Ah, you so tenderly nurtured in watchful affection, what can you tell of the terrors of my lonely childhood? Remember how I had been brought up—what stories, wild as the scenery, had been poured into my ears—stories of pixies, of ghosts, of haunted houses, of deep mines where the spirits of ancient miners worked

in the lonely levels—stories of bleak moors where demons wandered in the shape of dogs, black and gaunt, and, above all, the story of Tregeagle, that desolate spirit who, on the wide moor where lies Dozmare Pool, howls in despair over his impossible tasks. Think of all this before you condemn me as ignorant and foolish, and remember I had no guide, no parent, no one to love me; and the times sixty years ago were as the dark ages compared to the days in which we live now.

I am an old woman, and tell my tale with too many breaks and reflections. I will go on more rapidly now.

I rose from my knees calm and refreshed by my outpouring of tears and words; moreover, my faith was so great that I felt sure God would send me help. In rising, my dress, which I had tied up short to aid my climbing, fell down, and with it the great crumpled sheets of paper which had

come rustling to meet me in the dark arched passage. I had tied them up in my dress in order to have my hands free when I got from the window. I spread these papers out now on my knee. They were all alike—great, flaring, yellow papers, printed in enormous letters; and I read these gigantic words:—

“ONE THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD.

“Whereas, on the night of the 16th instant, the mansion of Treval was feloniously broken into by a gang of thieves, habited in black masks, who overcame, gagged, and bound the three servants who alone awoke and perceived them, and then carried off the following articles of plate and jewellery.”

Here came a list which I need not copy.

“And whereas, it was discovered on the morning after the burglary that Miss Alicia Tremaine was missing. It is supposed that this young lady was barbarously murdered

by these miscreants, and her body secreted. Therefore, his Majesty the King hereby graciously offers 200*l.* reward and a free pardon to any person, or persons, or accomplice, who will divulge such facts as shall lead to the apprehension of the culprits and to the recovery of Miss Alicia Tremaine, dead or living.

“Also, Sir Theobald Tremaine, of Treval, does, on his part, offer a reward of 500*l.* to whomsoever shall restore to him his missing daughter, or recover her dead body. And Admiral Treganowen, of Treganowen Towers, offers an additional sum of 300*l.* for the like purpose.”

I paused in my reading, aghast and astonished, for Admiral Treganowen was my grandfather, and I had but to turn my head to see the towers of Treganowen faintly outlined against the evening sky. The place was cold, desolate, and shut up, now my father was away, but Miss Mildred

and I drove over there every three months ; and this very seat of mine on the roof I had chosen because from hence I could see the home that was one day to be mine, when the parents I could scarcely remember came to claim me.

Then what was the meaning of this handbill ? and why should my grandfather care so much for this murdered Alicia Tremaine that he identifies himself with her father in offering this large reward ?

I thought and wondered till the sun set, and the gathering darkness of a November evening grew chilly around me. Then, cramped and cold, and feeling like one in a dream, I rose painfully, and began to roll up the loose sheets or handbills, which I determined to peruse carefully another time. In rolling them up, the date struck my eye, and I perceived they were five-and-twenty years old, and the month and day of the burglary were the very same as this—this,

on which these papers had so strangely come rustling to my hand. Struck by this coincidence, I examined them more closely. There were three of them rudely fastened together. The second gave a detailed description of the missing lady, and, as I read of the bright hazel eyes, the long golden-brown hair, the fair complexion, a something intangible brought Miss Mildred's face before me, and I began to wonder what she and Miss Admonitia were like five-and-twenty years ago, when they were young; and who was this fair Alicia? Was she their sister? and if so, why had they never mentioned her?

As if to answer me, a sudden rustle of wind blew over the two upper handbills, turning them back upon my arm, displaying the third, on which, with an increasing horror, I perceived an additional reward was offered for the apprehension of the murderers of Miss Alicia Tremaine, who had

insolently deposited her mangled body in a rude coffin at the great doors in the north front of Treval House, on the night of the 21st of January, 1779. The bill went on to relate particulars, but rain-drops fell down on me as I read, and great clouds, gathering from the west, darkened the dull sky with rapidly-coming night. I could read no more, and shivering in every limb after my strange fever, I put the papers in my pocket, and thought of how I should get back to my room.

I walked across the leads to the trap-door, and, kneeling down, tried to lift it. It was fastened from within, and as I tore at it with my nails, there came floating unbidden before my eyes the body of the murdered Miss Alicia, insolently brought to her father's door by her unknown murderers. I chased away the vision as I strove with all my small strength to force open the trap-door. But what were my weak hands

against the strong bolts within? I acknowledged at last I was mad to try. There only remained to me to return by the way I had come, but I rejected this alternative instantly. I felt I should go mad or die long before I could creep through those tortuous arched passages beneath the chimneys, or traverse the long dark space between them; and I closed my eyes with a low moan and shudder, as I thought of that crouching white horror, with its ghastly face, hovering near me, while some chill voice in my heart seemed to whisper it was Alicia's spirit. Better a thousand times pass the night out here on the roof, in the free air of the autumn sky, than lose my wits or my life down there in that dusty black darkness, with a nameless shape creeping by me!

The warm soft rain of the western November began to fall fast in heavy drops, and the sweeping wind, coming in with a

roll of thunder from the Atlantic, whistled around the Gothic pile of chimneys, and lingered wistfully in echoes among the tree-tops. Looking down from the roof, I could still see the drenched evergreens drooping dark and heavy beneath the rain, and the long sweep of the smooth lawn, with here and there a black clump of firs, or lighter mass of elm and ash, clothed in that faded autumn leaf which the lightest wind whirls mournfully away. I could still see the shining granite blocks upon the moor, but the sea was hidden by a long, low roll of black clouds, and the wood which stretched away on my left hand to the south was a mass of darkness.

Then it crept and gathered about me, this darkness, and the rain came pouring down drenchingly, till, unable to stand against it, I wrapped my defenceless head in my chintz frock, like Virginia, and clung to the buttress of the chimney for support.

As I stood here, bending to the storm, with all my fancies gone, my imagination chilled and dead, I was only a poor, forlorn little child, weeping; my supernatural agedness, if I may call it so, all washed out of me by the rain, and the importunities of the flesh crying for warmth and comfort very sharply at my pinched heart.

I think I had two selves—that mysterious, romantic, strange self of which I was sometimes even *afraid*, which was old, old, old as the hills, and had traversed a thousand worlds, and was ever trying to make my other self understand its mystic lore, its mighty sorrow; but it spoke in a language that could not be uttered; so my human ears heard, and could not comprehend, and my human tongue vainly tried to interpret, those unknown, awful whisperings. And the other was my childish *new* self, which enjoyed a picture-book, considered thin bread-and-butter a treat, though it preferred

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jam, and joyously trundled a hoop, though it was thirteen years old.

Alas! this poor little self was very weary now, weeping forlornly against the tall chimneys, chilled, drenched, lonely, and frightened. Suddenly, just as I was thinking there was no hope of release, and I must pass the night in this bleak, high loneliness on the roof—if the great hawks and sea-birds did not carry me away—I saw coming shining up the southern avenue through the wood two glaring globes, like eyeballs of fire. In a moment I knew it was a carriage, and, not stopping to wonder who it was arriving, I crept to the edge of the platform, and as it drew up to the door, I shouted for help with all my might.

A tall gentleman with iron-grey hair, whom, by the glare of the lamps, I saw alighting from the carriage, was the first to hear me.

In the pouring rain he stood a moment,

his upturned face plainly visible to me, as he strove to discover whence the forlorn cry proceeded coming thus strangely out of the darkness. A rush of thoughts came upon me—a recollection of that face leaning over my cot, beneath a swinging punkah, and I cried out with all the energy of my soul—

“Father, father, help me! I am dying of cold here at Treval!—shut out!—shut out from every one!—here on the roof!”

But the wind seemed to carry my voice away into the night, and my father's eyes, looking from window to window, saw nothing of the forlorn little figure waving its arms frantically above him.

If I could throw something down, I thought, he would see me.

Then I remembered the great handbills in my pocket, and, taking them out and unrolling them, I tore off the topmost one. But it was not heavy enough, so, after a

moment's thought, I unclasped my coral necklace, and wound it tightly round and round the paper; then, I flung it with all my force beyond the slates.

It fell near my father's feet. He took it up, unwound the coral beads from the hideous packet, and by the light of the lamp read it.

And this was his welcome to Treval.

"My God! whence does this come?"

In the sudden lull of the wind, his words, in all their ghastly horror and pain, fell as distinctly on my ear as the patter of the rain-drops on the leads.

"I threw it, papa!—your little child—your daughter—here on the roof!"

He looked up, and the small white figure on the dizzy brink of the platform met his eyes, looking dim and ghostly in the night and storm.

"Esther, my child, is it you? Go back, I implore you, go back! Do not come so

near the edge! Will they never open the door?" he cried.

But, as he spoke, the servants flung the portals wide, and I had not many moments to wait ere the bolts of the trap-door were drawn aside, and, sobbing, shivering, drenched, I found myself in my father's arms.

CHAPTER VI.

QUESTIONS rained upon me fast from his tremblings lips as he kissed me, but I could answer none. I was really ill; excitement, cold, and terror had prostrated all my powers. I was glad to let myself be put to bed, and then, holding my father's hand as he sat by me, I listened with intense but silent joy as he told me he was come to England on a leave of three years, and had departed so immediately after receiving it that he had reached Treval before the letter sent to announce his arrival had come to our hands. He had that day landed at Falmouth, where he had left my mother too ill and exhausted to come on to Treval without first resting a few hours. But,

eager to see his child, he had himself been unable to restrain his impatience, so had driven hither at once. And to-morrow he would send me in Miss Tremaine's carriage to fetch my mother, while he went on to Treganowen to prepare the servants and the house for our arrival.

I fell asleep full of joy with my father's kiss on my cheek, but when I awoke in the morning a strange dull pain possessed my head and limbs. Nevertheless, I was too happy to think much of it. I got up and restlessly helped to pack my trunks, locking away carefully in a little writing-case the two remaining handbills which I had in my pocket. Just as I had finished doing this, Miss Admonitia entered my room and gripped me by the shoulder with her thin white hand.

"Have you any more papers like this one?" she asked in a low, stern voice.

She held in her hand the flaring yellow

paper I had flung down at my father's feet. I was ill; my head was dizzy and confused, and I was afraid of Miss Admonitia—afraid, however, with that sort of fear which is a silent antagonism and hatred. To any one else I might have confessed all, but to her, no; so I answered feverishly and angrily that I had no more papers like that.

My face burned at the untruth, but I tried to console my conscience by saying it was not altogether false, since the bills were certainly not exactly similar.

"Where did you find this one?" asked Miss Admonitia in a kinder tone.

"On the roof," I answered, "beneath the leads, as I was going up there yesterday."

At this moment my father entered the room and joined abruptly in the conversation.

"Do you often go on the leads, Esther?" he said.

"Yes," I answered softly.

"And why do you often go on the leads?" demanded Miss Admonitia in a sharp, suspicious tone.

I gave her no answer till a look from my father repeated the question.

"I go," said I, "because from the roof I can see my home—I can see the towers of Treganowen."

My father instantly put his hand on my head, and spoke in a slightly tremulous voice—

"The servants should not have fastened down the trap-door, when they knew the poor child indulged in this dangerous habit, without first seeing if she was on the roof."

"Depend upon it," said Miss Admonitia, "if I can discover the careless culprit, he or she shall not forget my reprimand."

Here she stooped suddenly and kissed me.

"Poor child! so it was only to see Treganowen you clambered so high."

"Do not scold any one," said I, as I shrank away from her touch; "the door was most likely bolted when I got on the roof."

"But you must have opened it," remarked my father, "to get there."

"No; I crept along under the leads to the north-west corner, and got out of the casement window on to the roof."

My father looked at Miss Admonitia in amazement, and his eyes flashed with an anger that he seemed anxious yet unable to repress. She met his glance with a slight increase of paleness, and an evident astonishment and vexation at my confession. Indeed, her surprise and uneasiness were so great that the paper which she held concealed under her apron rustled in her trembling hand. I observed she had hidden it there the moment she heard my father's step.

"She risked her life," he said with a

shudder, as his troubled glance fell from her to me. "It was not in our compact that she should be killed here in this deadly house. I should have thought," he added, in a softer tone, "that you, and Mildred especially, would have cared more for my poor child."

While he spoke, Miss Admonitia's eyes scanned my face with intense anxiety, but it was not an anxiety for me, and there was something in his reproach that roused a strange fierceness within her.

"And why should Mildred care for your child?" she cried, as she suddenly drew from beneath her silk apron the coarse, flashing, yellow paper with its huge black letters. "Is this the reason why she should care, Colonel Treganowen?"

My father turned frightfully pale, while her own face flushed to that sullen red which any strong emotion brought to her cheeks.

"Poor patient martyr," she continued; "innocent, yet constantly accusing herself of crime, while the guilty go unpunished!— is it for that reason or for this," striking the hideous proclamation with her hand, "that Colonel Treganowen expects Mildred Tremaine to love his child?"

My father held his hand towards her tremblingly, and sank into a chair.

"Oh, Admonitia, do not try me too hard," he murmured.

She looked at him coldly. It was easy to see she was gratified by the pain on his pale face. And some curious instinct told me that if kindness had prompted her at first to hide the terrible paper, it was his reproach respecting me, when she evidently thought some other feeling should be dominant within him, which induced her to show it. Perhaps she revenged her sister.

"Esther," said Miss Admonitia, turning to me, "have you read this thing?"

"Yes," said I, faintly.

"And you have not asked your father who Miss Alicia Tremaine was, for whose recovery this poor gold is offered here?"

"Admonitia, spare me." The words in a faint, low voice fell from my father's lips like a groan.

She went on remorselessly—

"Esther, Alicia Tremaine was my sister, my most dear and beautiful sister; and she was murdered, and her dead body, disfigured by wounds, by imprisonment, by anguish unutterable, was brought to this house in the dead of night and laid in the north porch. This was five-and-twenty years ago, when your father was a young man, and he loved her dearly."

These last words seemed the cruelest of all, for my father half rose from his chair, and then sank down aghast, almost speechless.

"Admonitia," he gasped forth, "you

have no right—Mildred forgave me long ago.”

“Mildred is gentle, good, and forgiving as an angel,” said Admonitia. And as she spoke of her sister her face softened, the sullen red in her cheeks died out, her lips began to tremble, and coming forward she laid her hand on my father’s shoulder.

“Heaven knows, Ralph Treganowen, that I too have forgiven you from my very soul, but there are times when memory is too strong for me, that is all. Could *I* help forgiving you when I saw Mildred pardoning all, yet leading the life of a martyr upon earth?”

“It is true, it is true,” murmured my father, as he took Admonitia’s hand. “She is indeed a saint.”

But he released her fingers, and shrank away as the paper she held touched him.

“Burn it,” he said; “I cannot bear the sight of it.”

"And I, then, and Mildred?" asked Miss Admonitia, in a calm tone, which had nevertheless a ring of reproach in it. "Well," she added softly, "let this little one, who is our bond of union, and the link who is to rivet our mutual forgiveness and love, let her burn this wretched relic of the past. Esther, put this in the fire and let it burn to ashes."

I obeyed wonderingly, my father watching me the while with eyes which seemed to look, not at me, but at some phantom of the past, which appeared to him in the flame of the consuming paper.

Then they both kissed me, and bade me be quick and dress, as the carriage would soon be at the door to take me to Falmouth.

"Mind you wish Miss Mildred good-bye kindly and affectionately," whispered my father, as he lingered a moment after Miss Admonitia left the room.

Had he, then, instinctively guessed that I did not like Miss Mildred ?

I was full of wonder at the strange words I had heard, but I dared not ask a question. My father was still such a stranger to me, and I to him, that I felt the time was not yet come for mutual confidence. Moreover, the newness of being with him, and the expectancy and delight of my coming interview with my mother, so filled my mind that curiosity was less on the stretch respecting other things, and even the adventure of yesterday faded away dimly before all my new joys.

CHAPTER VII.

NEVERTHELESS, when, dressed to depart, I knocked softly at Miss Mildred's door, the recollection of my timid knock the day previous bounded back hotly on me, with first the flush and then the chill of fever; but somehow I felt so much older to-day, that I smiled to myself at my childish superstition, just as we smile at a nightmare vanished.

Mildred did not say this time, "What do you want?" In the silver clear tones peculiar to her, she simply bade me "Come in."

Here was a bright room, so warm, so comfortable, so little mysterious in its aspect, that I smiled again at yesterday's

thoughts; and here, seated by the window, working for the poor, was the pale, fragile, unearthly lady whom all the household loved so well.

Were any sick, then Miss Mildred tended them; were any sorrowful, then Miss Mildred comforted them; were any stricken with remorse, and writhing in the thought of unforgiven sin, then Miss Mildred fasted and prayed for them.

She held out her thin, white transparent hand, through which one could see the light, and drew me gently towards her.

"You were frightened yesterday," she said, "my poor little Esther."

My heart beat with a sudden bound, and I looked at her with a terrified glance. I half thought she knew what I had seen, and I felt a horror, a fear of her knowing it beyond the power of words to tell. A moment more reassured me.

"It must have been very terrible to find

yourself shut out on the leads, my love. You were glad you had something to throw down at your father's feet, were you not?"

"Yes, I was glad," said I, uneasily.

Miss Mildred detected this feeling in me instantly.

"It was not your fault," she said, "that it was that dreadful proclamation—that was God's doing."

She closed her eyes, and pressing her thin, small palms together, seemed absorbed a moment in prayer. For some reason, to-day I saw she liked me better than she had ever done yet, but I only grew more uneasy under her new affection.

"God's doing," she murmured, as she leant back in her chair, her large eyes still closed. "And He chooses the child for an instrument."

"Esther," she said aloud, "it was strange yesterday you should have got on the roof by the window, as Admonitia tells me you

did"—she put her arm around me here, and shuddered with a sincere feeling for my danger—"stranger still you should have found that hideous advertisement of the horror in our family which we have always kept secret from you, and strangest of all"—here she stooped and kissed me—"that you should have flung it down at your father's feet to welcome him to Treval."

I writhed a little, and tried to free myself from her embrace, but she held me firmly.

"Esther, when you first came to us, a little child of six, I knew you would hear ghastly stories enough; in this corner of the world the people are too fond of them, and I forbade them to add this frightful history to their list. I knew the servants would obey me, so I had no fear of its reaching you to scare you in your sleep and play, or in your wanderings about our old mansion—little explorer, is there a single

corner of it which you do not know? But Admonitia and I intended, when you were old enough, to give you the sad details ourselves. We were bound by a promise to your father not to do this without his permission, but there was a period fixed for his giving it; and mine were to be the lips to tell the tale—that was his part of the compact, and he owed it to me. The knowledge of my sister's murder has come to you prematurely, through no fault of ours, but I abstain from giving you her story, because this promise still binds me. Nevertheless, I release him from his. Tell your father from me that he has my permission to relate Alicia Tremaine's history to you when he thinks fit, and—yes—say he may speak of me as he thinks fit also."

She paused and covered her face with her hands, but they were so emaciated and small, that through the thin fingers I saw the working of her lips and the ghastly

pallor of her ashy cheeks. She strove with herself, and seemed to grow calm suddenly as a slight noise in the bedroom within attracted her attention. She listened to it with a bright light growing into her eyes, which looked like devilry to my childish fancy, but which was only the glow of devotion, for her lips were murmuring in prayer.

“Esther,” she said again—and her small silken hand rested on my head—“if your father says that I was a proud, passionate, capricious girl, full of contempt for others, yet naturally envious and jealous, let me humbly confess that it is true. If he says that my sister Alicia was beautiful, good, and self-sacrificing as only divine natures are, let me humbly say again that it is true. If he adds that he loved Alicia with his whole heart, while he hated me with a bitter and cruel loathing, then pity me, Esther, with all your young soul pity me,

for my wedding-day was fixed, and I was to have been his wife on the very morning that my sister's murder made me what you see me now."

Her soft silken hand sank from my hair to my neck, and her bent head fell forward on my shoulder, while her whole frame shook with anguish.

"If," she said, as her emaciated fingers, clasping me tightly, seemed to burn into my flesh—"if years of penance, of prayer, of fasting can atone for the pride and cruelty of my youth, then surely God will show me mercy. Oh, Esther! perhaps you are happy because you have no sister to torment you into sin."

At this moment the door of the bedroom suddenly opened, and the old servant, Martha, came out.

"Miss Mildred," she said, reproachfully, "why will you be for ever accusing yourself of evils you could not hinder? If *you* are

self-reproachful, what, then, ought others to be? You have led the life of a martyr, while other folks have enjoyed the world pretty well, I believe."

She glanced at me as she spoke, and I knew she meant my father.

Miss Mildred answered Martha's speech by a faint smile; then, repressing any mark of agitation, she rose and took me by the hand.

"You are going to leave me, Esther. Come into my room and choose something from my trinkets for a keepsake. Take care of the steps."

This was the first time I had ever been invited to enter Miss Mildred's room, and my eyes wandered round it with a vivid, inexplicable curiosity. I had an involuntary expectation of seeing something wonderful, and I felt a disappointment and sort of surprise at the ordinary, every-day aspect of this mysterious chamber. A neat little

room, beautifully white and simple, a modern bed with long snowy muslin curtains, a carpet of pure green, sprinkled with white rosebuds, a large wardrobe of walnut-wood, a white toilet service on a marble slab, and this was all, with the exception of a closed cupboard or closet in the wall.

Looking up, I perceived Mildred was watching my examination of her room with a sort of amusement on her pale face.

"There are no skeletons in the closet, Esther," she said, with a sad smile. "The great skeleton of our house you discovered yesterday on the roof. You need not look so red and frightened, my child; I am glad myself that fate disclosed that history to you on the very day that your father came. Now go and look in the closet if you like, and in the wardrobe too. I perceive this is a sort of Bluebeard chamber for you."

She opened the closet door as she spoke, and I certainly wondered a little as I saw it

was fitted up almost like a pantry or kitchen. Here were saucepans, a tea-kettle, dishes, and cups, all in exquisite cleanliness and order, and a good fire burned briskly in a little stove.

"You see now," she said, "how it is Ady and I trouble the servants so little. When we want tea, or coffee, or broth, Martha gets it for us without descending to the remote kitchen, which is certainly a quarter of a mile from this unfrequented portion of the house. And then she washes our plates and cups here. Indeed, I would not trust them out of my room into any other servant's hands. All that set of china was given me by your grandfather, Esther."

She sighed deeply, and shut the door of this inner room, which perhaps was once a dressing-closet; then, turning to the wardrobe, she opened both the carved leaves and took from the upper shelf a casket of silver filigree, lined with blue velvet—faded now—

and securely locked; the key, enamelled and jewelled, was hanging to her watch.

On the top of the casket, on a scroll of frosted silver, were the initials M. S. T., formed of turquoise; but inside, wrought on the blue velvet in seed-pearls, I read the words—

“Mildred Salome Treganowen. From her husband, Ralph Treganowen.”

“Did my father give you this?” I exclaimed involuntarily.

“Yes,” answered Mildred in her soft, sad voice. “The morning on which my sister was missed, I have told you, was to have been our wedding-day. Some think the jewels in this casket were the bait which drew the murderers here. It may have been so, but they took plenty besides this,” she said, laying her hand on the box.

“Did they take this?” I cried. “Then how is it you have it now?”

“It was sent back to me in my sister’s

rough coffin ; it was the pillow on which they laid her poor head."

I started back, and removed my hand from the soft velvet with an exclamation of horror.

"All the jewels were in it intact," continued Mildred ; "but they were nothing to me, to my father, to Admonitia. There they lie, Esther, all tarnished, and untouched since that dreadful day ; here is the reason why the box is dear to me."

She removed the inner lining of the wadded velvet, and between this and the outer covering lay a piece of faded yellow paper.

"Read it, Esther," said Mildred.

I stooped down, and with difficulty made out the faded words :—

"Forgive me, Mildred, all the past. My wretched life is no longer an obstacle to your happiness. Ralph will return to you

now I am gone. I have left you to him as my last legacy. I send you back your bridal jewels; array yourself in them joyously for your wedding, Mildred, and let no thought of my terrible fate disturb your peace. I have bought back your diamonds by a promise to *him* that all further pursuit shall now cease. Bid my father respect my promise as he would the request of one already dead. And so farewell, and may God bless you all, my dear ones! My last words as I die will be a cry to my father for forgiveness.

“Your wretched imprisoned sister,

“ALICIA.”

I felt the blood forsake my cheeks as I read these lines, written, doubtless, a few hours, or perhaps minutes, before the unfortunate writer—who evidently anticipated her doom—was murdered.

“I cannot take anything from that box,”

said I, pushing it away. Then I laid my hand on Miss Mildred's arm. "And were your sister's murderers never discovered?" I asked.

"Never," she answered, in a faint, hollow voice, her eyes as she spoke looking fixed and unnatural, as they gazed seemingly at some sight I could not see. Then turning to the casket with evident repugnance, she replaced the velvet lining and closed the cover over the glittering contents.

"Esther," she said, "you are like your father—given to superstition. He has constantly refused to receive these jewels, though since I declined to be his wife they are certainly his, not mine. But he looks upon them as the price of blood; his idea being that Alicia was carried away by the robbers as a sort of hostage to insure their own safety. And he fancies she must have rashly persuaded one of the band to restore these jewels, or perhaps secrete them for

that purpose, and this so enraged the rest that in their fury they murdered her."

"And do you think so?" said I.

Miss Mildred shook her head mournfully.

"If she was murdered for the jewels, why did they send them back?"

Then, in her clear, sad voice she continued to speak as to herself, musingly—

"If I could think as your father does, that she was taken away by *force*, then I might believe she and her captors had some deadly quarrel over this poor casket; but what if she went *willingly*? what if the whole robbery was planned by her, and it was she who admitted the thieves?"

"Miss Mildred!" I exclaimed, in intense astonishment, "are you mad?"

"Esther, I forget," she answered hurriedly, "that you do not know all this sad story, and cannot, therefore, understand my reasons for this suspicion, and it is not for me to tell you the tale. Let your father tell

it, at his own time and in his own way. Now," she added, in another tone, "we will choose this important keepsake. What do you say to this Indian scarf, since you will not have jewels, or this carved fan, or this agate box, Esther?"

She took each thing from a drawer as she spoke, and held it up to me.

The box possessed on the lid a portrait of Marie Antoinette as dauphiness, so I chose this eagerly, and thanked her with the warmest kiss that had ever yet passed from my lips to Miss Mildred's thin cheek. For some subtle reason I understood her and liked her better to-day than I had ever yet done.

This secret of her sister's murder, which I felt now had ever been floating around me since I entered Treval—coming sometimes near in whispered talk of servants, waning away in Miss Admonitia's reserve, yet approaching me again through Mildred's wan

cheeks—ever within my grasp, and yet untouched, till at last it reaches me through the hands, as it appeared to me, of a spirit—well, this secret once told, the invisible barrier between me and the sisters was down, and I felt now that if I stayed at Treval I should be welcomed to their sitting-room with a look, and a smile different from the unnatural serenity, or frozen guardedness I had hitherto known.

Miss Mildred wrapped the little agate box in a handkerchief trimmed with Mechlin lace, and put it in my hand.

“Now, Esther,” she said, “we’ll go back to the sitting-room, unless there is anything else you would like to see among my curiosities.”

I looked round the room lingeringly, and it was then I espied a tall pile of trunks in one corner, ready corded.

“Are you going with us to Treganowen?” I cried, astonished.

"I was going there when those boxes were packed," said Miss Mildred, and her voice sounded like a dreary echo; "but neither they nor I will ever make that journey now. Go and look at them, Esther."

I went, and then saw their coverings were faded and worn, their cords in some places broken, and they all bore, in spite of the extreme care with which it was evident they were brushed and dusted, that curious look of age and pain which things laid by invariably acquire, as if they gathered to them all the ghastly thoughts of death and decay which every-day life sweeps from the heart.

These boxes all bore, on a small brass plate, this address:—

MRS. RALPH TREGANOWEN,

Treganowen Towers.

I looked at Miss Mildred, and before she

spoke I knew by the shade of increased paleness on her ashy cheeks that these coffins—how can I call them by any other name?—of her wedding outfit had remained unopened since the dreadful day of her sister's disappearance.

“Martha and I sat up very late on the 16th of November, five-and-twenty years ago, to finish the packing of these boxes, Esther. You see there is only one left unlocked and uncorded. It is the one in which my wedding-dress was to have been put after the ceremony. Come away, my dear; they are but a sad folly to look at now. I have piled them up there like a monument sacred to the memory of my dead youth and my murdered sister. I never meant to get eccentric about them, but in the agony of Alicia's disappearance they were unthought of. Then came her death and its long horror, and mourning, and still they remained there untouched; till at last

it seemed like sacrilege to remove them. When you grow older, Esther, you will understand the superstition of the heart which gathers round any accustomed relics, making household gods of them, and shrinking painfully from their displacement or the sacrilege of a stranger's unthinking touch. It is this feeling which, coming gradually upon me through a terrible ordeal of anguish, made these mementoes sacred, and pardons my eccentric tenderness for them. And here let me explain, my dear, that in this little folly of mine you behold the reason why you have never hitherto entered this room. Admonitia and I thought you would ask questions which we could not answer when you observed these boxes, addressed, as you would suppose, to your mother. Once more, Esther, mind the steps! Any one coming from our sitting-room fancies this is on the same level, and many a stranger has had a fall over these

steps; but you perceive this floor is much lower, owing to the library having been heightened when my great-grandfather made the alterations in this front."

"The steps are ugly," said I; "they and the pile of old boxes spoil your pretty room. At least you should carpet these little cramped stairs."

"And where would Martha's occupation be?" said Miss Mildred with a little laugh, which sounded curiously from her, she laughed so rarely. "She delights in polishing them to a most dangerous slipperiness, obliging me to say to every one, as I did to you—'Mind the steps.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

WE entered the sitting-room as she spoke, and found Martha laying out a little round table by the fire, with fruit, wine, and cake.

"What are you doing this for, Martha?" asked Mildred.

"You and Miss Esther will have a long drive to Falmouth," said Martha, "so you must take something before you go. The landau is coming round at twelve; it's long past eleven now, and—oh, Miss Mildred, why, you are not dressed!"

"Martha, we argued that matter last night," said Mildred, in the coldest of her clear tones. "I am not going. Admonitia is dressing to accompany Esther."

"You, Miss Mildred, an angel in all else, is it possible you——?"

But a knock at the door stopped Martha's speech. It was Timothy Pryor, with a bunch of flowers in his hand, and a note.

"From the colonel, madam," said Timothy; "he is going to Treganowen, and he hopes he shall have the pleasure of seeing you there this evening."

"Thank you," said Mildred. "Put the nosegay on the table, Timothy."

The strange, desolate ring in her clear, soft voice made me look at her face. It was not whiter than usual—I doubt if anything could make it whiter—but it was more terrible, more unearthly in its aspect than I had ever seen it before. Any less white face could never look with the ghastly wofulness that hers looked.

"Why does he send me flowers?—why send me letters?" she cried passionately, as the heavy door closed after Timothy.

"Miss Mildred!" exclaimed Martha—and I saw the tears well into her eyes as she looked at her mistress.

"Take the flowers away," said Mildred, shudderingly, but in a more gentle tone "Put them in there, my good Martha"—she pointed to the bedroom door—"add them to his other gifts; it is fit they should be together."

"Had I not better wait a little?" said Martha, soothingly; but she glanced at me as she spoke.

"No, no!" answered Mildred, smoothing my hair with her hand. "Esther shall drink her wine and read her father's letter for me, while you arrange my nosegay, Martha."

The old servant obeyed, but with a strange look of dislike in her face, and when she shut the bedroom door I certainly heard her turn the lock.

"Martha is determined we shall not dis-

turb her as she arranges the flowers," said Mildred, smiling, as she poured out some wine for me.

But I saw, nevertheless, that she was vexed at the act, and perhaps felt it as an impertinence.

"Now, Esther, read the letter. Your father's writing tries my eyes too much. I have not looked at it these twenty years."

"Do you think I may read it?" said I, as I took the note up timidly. "Will not papa be angry?"

"I will promise you he shall not. It is only one of his blind invitations to stay with him and his wife, and—oh, Esther, I cannot read it!"

When Miss Mildred's voice broke from its usual calm, there was a pathos, a beauty, an anguish in it indescribable, that spoke to the heart in accents irresistible, wringing from it such pity, such sympathy, that one's whole nature fell prostrate before the spell,

softened into implicit obedience to the desolate suffering that spoke in such a tone.

I read the letter without another word—

“DEAREST MILDRED,—Let my second return to England after an absence of so many years be happier than the first. Let me see you, and hear the assurance from your own lips that you forgive the past. God knows my innocence, and how little I could anticipate that an involuntary change of feeling—for which I could never account, and to which I *never* yielded—should prove the deadly source from which should spring such dire events. Mildred, in return for the anguish my hand drew upon you, I offered you, I gave you, my life. I would have lived a hermit for your sake; but when you wished me to marry, I obeyed; when you asked me for my child, I obeyed. Esther is yours——”

I started, and looked into Miss Mildred's

deep grey eyes in some consternation. She smiled back into my face with a kind, sad smile. •

“Do not fear, Esther,” she said. “You see he takes back his gift to-day. Go on.”

I went on in a lower tone, and my voice trembled—

“And if I restore her to her mother to-day, in that also I obey you, and none the less will her future fate be in your hands. Until you say ‘Speak,’ I will be silent, both to her mother and herself. She shall never hear the name of him——”

“Stop!” exclaimed Mildred, hurriedly.

But, although my voice obeyed her, my eyes, rapidly glancing down the page, continued to read these words:—

“——to whom we destine her; she shall never see him till *you* choose. The time, the place, and the marriage itself, depend entirely on your will. I look on Esther as absolutely yours. As to——”

But at this moment Mildred took the letter from my hand, and turned the page abruptly. She had crept round behind me so softly that I had not heard her, and I screamed as she touched me.

"You are a very sensitive, nervous child, Esther," said Mildred, while her trembling hand, which clasped my father's letter with a repugnant shudder, attested to her own nervous and perilous temperament. "Yours will be a passionate nature when you are a woman. And you have an imagination glowing and dangerous as a volcano. If any suffering comes upon you, Esther, it will eat at your brain and heart like a fire; perhaps you would go mad."

She looked at me with a curious, deep, cold scrutiny that brought a shudder over my whole frame. My hands trembled and my cheeks flushed to burning at her words. I felt she spoke the truth, and the myste-

rious allusion to me in my father's letter was already doing its work.

"You should conquer your imagination," pursued Mildred, "or one day you will find it your cruelest enemy. If I had known the secret intention of your father and myself was named in this letter, I would not have put it into your hands. I thought it was merely one of his stupid invitations to Treganowen. As if I were made of stone or wood, like himself," she broke out abruptly, "and could pass through fire unscathed, or as if I could let him see me writhing in the flame. God help me ! there are fiends of love and of hate in some hearts, but the blind who rouse them stand by at their deadly struggle and never see it !"

She stopped suddenly, and walked up and down the room, turning her face from my gaze. But in a moment or two, calm and quiet as ever, she came to me, and laid her silken hand again on my shoulder.

“Esther, I cannot explain the letter ; but you are a sensible girl, you will not allow it to dwell morbidly in your mind, or excite your feelings. Do not speak of this matter to your father ; you would distress him. I am obliged to let you finish his note, that you may see how much you would distress him. Now read on this page.”

I had been so accustomed to obey Miss Mildred that I did so now, although something in my nature revolted against the command, and my blood was coursing with the recurring heat and chill of fever through my veins.

The page contained these words :—

“ — will never hear of her existence till permitted by you. This is much too exact of a father, but I owe you much, and therefore I obey you. In return, I only ask that you will see me, and give me your hand in kindness ; then, and then only, shall I think you mean well to my child.

Yes, I ask one thing more : do not break my heart by letting Esther know there is any secret, any mystery, between you and me. I could not bear the child's innocent questions ; they would kill me.

“Come to Treganowen with Esther and my wife, if you are my friend. Accept some kindness from me, and let me help you, dear Mildred, to fling off for ever this morbid and passionate clinging to past memories which ought long ago to have been buried in poor Alicia's grave.”

This was all, save the signature.

“‘Fling off past memories !’ It is easy for him to say so,” repeated Mildred, in her most desolate voice. “He does not know how much I spare him. He is not haunted as I am ; no one tells him that my sister's shadow—her horrible, creeping, hideous shadow—is ever near me. I have only to turn to see it when I will. Fling it off ! O God ! what would I not give to fling it

off for ever! Bury it in her grave! Ah, why could it not rest there?"

She hid her face in her hands, and her emaciated, shadowy frame shook as with some indescribable horror. By an inexplicable sympathy I knew that at that moment in her imagination as in mine the same ghastly figure was visible—the crouching, creeping terror of the roof groping through her mind darkly, as through mine.

"Oh, Miss Mildred!" I said, touching her pityingly; and at that moment I should have spoken of what I had seen, but a hand turned the lock, and Admonitia entered.

"The carriage is at the door," she said, cheerfully, "and I am waiting for you, Esther."

"Admonitia," said Miss Mildred—and she laid her hand, still slightly trembling from her late emotion, on her sister's arm—

"look ; I have inadvertently let the child read this letter. What is to be done?"

Miss Tremaine ran it through rapidly, and then glanced anxiously at her sister.

"If you are not sorry," she said, "let me confess that *I* am glad. Esther, were you surprised to find——?"

"Admonitia," exclaimed Mildred, hurriedly, "she did not read that page. Look; it was only this she saw."

They whispered together for a moment in the window, and then Admonitia turned towards me kindly.

"My dear," she said, "you have read enough of this letter to perceive there is a secret between Colonel Treganowen and Mildred; but it would grieve your father deeply if he were aware you knew this. Try, then, to bear it, even if it vexes you, and above all, do not ask questions. You see he says that would kill him. I am treating you like a woman, Esther, in speak-

ing thus. Many women have had to bear secrets all their life long, and they have died courageously rather than betray them. I am grieved to burden your young mind with even a shadow; but it cannot be helped now. It is, in reality, a nothing—a mere nothing. But a father's will should be law to a child, otherwise I would tell you at once what this is. In fact, it is a business matter, my dear, having to do with money, and it is entirely beyond a child's comprehension."

This speech did not deceive me, and perhaps Miss Tremaine felt this, for she said impatiently—

"Now wish Mildred good-bye, and let us go."

Mildred kissed me on the lips without a word, and then went slowly back to the window. On her haggard white cheeks there burnt two fevered spots of red. Admonitia gazed on her anxiously.

"Why will you not take a little wine?" she said impatiently. "You are ill."

Mildred shook her head, and fixed her eyes on the letter, which she still held in her hand.

Martha at this moment coming from the bedroom, observed her, and exchanged a glance with Admonitia; then she took the letter from Mildred's passive fingers.

"Ah, yes, my good Martha," she said abstractedly, "put it with my flowers; let it be where the dead live; it is fit they should be together." Then looking up, a ghastly change passed over her face. It was as if something had broken loose which she kept chained within her; and with a wild cry that that was her fitting posture, and God had punished the innocent for the guilty, she suddenly fell to the floor in the crouching and terrible attitude so distinctly impressed on my brain.

Before rushing to her aid, her sister

waved me from the room. Frightened, I obeyed; and it was some minutes before Miss Admonitia, the sullen red hot on her cheeks, joined me. We got into the carriage silently, and it was not until we had driven out of the park that she spoke.

“Esther,” she said, “Mildred thinks she has sinned in showing you that letter. And now she will fast and pray, and increase her sufferings till she brings herself to death’s door. She will deprive herself of sleep, and food, and comfort. Think of this sometimes when you are playing, or eating, or drinking, or laying your head on your warm pillow. Think then of Mildred fasting and watching in some lone room of that desolate home, to which a man’s fickleness brought such misery twenty-five years ago, and for her sake keep this foolish secret that we ask you. And remember, it is your father’s secret, not your mother’s; and you

have no right to *hint* it even to her without his consent."

"I will remember," I faltered, "I promise you."

"Very well," said Admonitia, relapsing into her cold manner; "I shall tell Mildred I have your word."

She did not speak again till we alighted at Falmouth. Can you wonder that when I entered my mother's presence my cheeks were burning and my hands cold, while my whole manner was embarrassed, and awkward, and frightened?

CHAPTER IX.

A LAUGUID lady, pale, and very pretty, lying on a sofa, held out her hand to me as I entered, without opening her eyes.

"Is it you, my dear?" she said. "I thought——"

"It is Esther," said Miss Tremaine, hastening forward. "My dear, embrace your mother."

My mother rose, with some curiosity in her pale blue orbs, and, holding me by the hand, scrutinized me earnestly.

"She is very small for her age," she said in a disappointed tone, and not nearly so pretty——"

"As you expected," interrupted Miss Admonitia. "Never mind; beauty will come

to her, depend on it. *You* are as pretty as ever, Mrs. Treganowen. The belle of Penrhyn, Lucy Polwhele, would still be the belle, even if her fortune yet remained to be made."

"I don't think so," said my mother, a little peevishly, as she shook hands with Miss Admonitia as we shake hands with an old friend. "The climate has sadly changed me. Ah!" she added, with a deep sigh, "when your sister took me over Treganowen Towers, and asked me what I'd give to be mistress of it, had I known all I should have to go through, I'm sure I never would have made the ridiculous bargain with her that——"

"But having made it——" interposed Miss Admonitia.

"Oh, of course I have no alternative but to submit," said my mother. "You need not be afraid of my objecting; the colonel won't let me speak on the subject. I'm

sure, if I had known his gloomy, tyrannical——”

“Esther, my dear,” interrupted Miss Tremaine, “run and ask Pryor for my muff; I’ve left it in the carriage.”

I went, and tears of pain and disappointment started to my eyes. This was my mother, of whom I had dreamed tenderly a thousand times!—for whose kiss, for whose love, my heart had yearned so warmly through my lonely childhood! and I could see already that her only feeling towards me merged fast from indifference into dislike.

I lingered long on my errand, swallowing my bitter grief. When I came back Miss Admonitia was speaking in a sharp voice.

“I insist on your being more cautious, Lucy,” I heard her say I as turned the handle of the door, “or Paul——”

“There, there!” said my mother, in an injured tone, as I came forward, “I under-

stand—he's to be unchained, and let loose upon me for my punishment, I suppose! I dreaded coming to England because of that man! You need not threaten me with him. I'm sure I don't know why I was ever born!"

She buried her face in her handkerchief and began to cry; but Miss Admonitia taking no notice of this, she, after a time, wiped her tears, and spoke in a deprecating voice—

"Miss Tremaine, I hope you will make allowances for my fatigue and excitement. I know you are my best friend, and have always proved yourself so. What should I have done at that dreadful time of my life if you had not helped me? What would have become of me when I was left an orphan but for you? Believe me, I do not forget these things, and I am not so foolish as you think. You may rely upon me for the future, indeed you may!"

"I am glad, Lucy, my dear," said Miss Admonitia, holding out her hand, "that your good sense is come back to you, and that you do me and Mildred justice. But do not call me your friend; all the kindness we may have shown you emanated from her. It is to her you owe your marriage and all your good fortune. You know her power over Colonel Treganowen, and no sooner were you arrived in India than, as you will remember, she accomplished all she had promised you respecting him."

"I remember," replied my mother, shrugging her pretty shoulders a little. "If Mildred were young it would be enough to make one jealous."

"Lucy!" exclaimed Miss Admonitia, in her sternest voice, "it is only such a woman as you who could use the word jealousy in connexion with Mildred. Good heavens! to think of her, and remember all her self-denial and patience!—her devotion and

Miss Admonitia drew from her bag, as she spoke, a morocco case, which inclosed a costly gold bracelet set with rubies. On receiving it, my mother, with surprising energy, started from the sofa and ran to the window to examine it. She was in an ecstasy of delight; her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed, and a hundred pretty words of praise and thanks fell from her lips. All her languor vanished; she was so changed and pleasant, and appeared to love Miss Mildred so much, that I longed to have something to give her also. I thought of the agate box, but, reflecting it was a keepsake, I felt I could not give it away. Then I remembered joyfully a large old-fashioned pearl brooch, or pin, given me long ago by a gentleman who had come to see the state rooms at Treval, and who had conquered my repugnance to his questions and carresses by this gift. I drew the pin now from my tippet, and offered it timidly to my mother.

"What is it, child?" she said, stooping towards me to look at it.

"It is a brooch with a long pin, mamma, that a gentleman gave me. Will you have it? Oh, do take it!—please do take it! I want to give it to you, and I wish it was prettier," said I earnestly, with tears of yearning in my eyes as I looked towards her, longing for a word of love.

My mother stooped again, kissed me kindly, and patted me on the cheek.

"What a curious thin little creature you are, Esther!" she said; "and you were plump as a cherub when you left India."

Then she turned to Miss Admonitia—

"Look here; what an antique bit of jewellery this is. Do you think it is worth anything?"

Miss Tremaine took it in her hand, and I saw by the sudden change in her face that something was the matter.

"In what room at Treval did you find

this, Esther?" she asked, with a singular inflection of voice.

A little frightened, I repeated my statement hesitatingly.

"When did the gentleman come?—how long ago?"

And Miss Admonitia spoke sharply now.

"In the summer, just before we went to St. Columb, where I used to make such great sand castles, like Treganowen Towers, at Bedruthan Steps."

"That was four years ago," she answered thoughtfully. "Then how is it I have never seen this before, Esther?"

"I pinned on my doll's cloak with it," said I; "but I did not take my doll to St. Columb, and after I came back from playing with those great rocks at Bedruthan I could not play with dolls any more. I put my playthings away, and this morning, when Sarah and I were packing, I took them from the box where they were, and gave them to

her for her little brother, except the brooch, which I found on the doll's cloak, just where I had put it before I went to St. Columb."

"It is very strange," said Miss Admonitia, in a low voice; "but this is one of the jewels stolen on that terrible night."

"No, no!—it can't be!" replied my mother, holding out her hand for it. "The child says a gentleman gave it to her."

"This brooch was my grandfather's," answered Miss Tremaine, in a voice that would not admit of contradiction. "Lucy, you know the portrait of the first Lady Tremaine at Treval. Well, do you recognise her here?"

She touched a spring, which opened the brooch, and displayed within the miniature of a lady in the dress of Queen Anne's time.

"The Cornish gentry were nearly all Jacobites, but my grandfather was a very

active partisan of the Hanoverian line, and received a baronetcy from George the First as his reward. This picture was taken just after he got the title, else the Bloody Hand would not disfigure the portrait in this tasteless way. Here, too, is Lady Tremaine's cipher — A. M. T. — Admonitia Mildred Tremaine. Are you convinced, Lucy?"

My mother was convinced, but not pleased. She pouted sullenly, while Admonitia continued thoughtfully to examine the brooch, which was large and clumsily manufactured.

"Esther," she said suddenly, "should you know the man again who gave you this?"

I shut my eyes, and called up before me the handsome but repelling face of the man who had seized me with such a hot, strong hand, and, compelling me to sit for a moment on his knee, had endeavoured to

conquer my repugnance to his touch by fastening this brooch in my white tippet.

"I should know him again anywhere," I said, decidedly.

Miss Admonitia looked at me with earnest thoughtfulness.

"I believe you will," she said. "Lucy, Esther never forgets any one she has once seen, or anything she has heard. She is well named Esther—Secret—for she is the most secret silent little creature that ever existed."

"I am sorry to hear it," responded my mother. "I hate such dispositions!"

Miss Admonitia took no notice of this speech.

"When I get home," she continued, "I'll show this pin to Mildred, and we'll look over the list of the articles stolen. I know it is fully described there, and I'll copy out

the description for you. I'll examine, too, the visitors' book for that year, and discover, if I can, what name this gentleman gave himself."

"What nonsense!" answered my mother, peevishly. "All the things have changed hands a hundred times in twenty-five years. Doubtless the gentleman bought the brooch honestly enough."

"Perhaps he did; but that is no reason why I should not try to find out how and where he bought it."

"I'm sure I would lose all the jewels that ever glittered," said my mother, with increased ill-humour, "rather than I'd rake up an affair that caused so much scandal and so many false surmises in its time."

Miss Admonitia's face turned of a deeper, more sullen red than I had ever seen it yet. She seemed about to speak angrily, but checked herself by a great effort, and there

was a moment of deep, painful silence before her sad voice broke it softly—

“You are right, Lucy; and although, God knows! I would give my life to discover my sister’s murderer, yet on such a slight clue as this it would be wrong to stir up the past. Esther, my dear, you must not be deprived of the pleasure of making your mamma a present. I will give you ten guineas for this brooch; I have no right else to take it from you. Now go and present them to your mother, unless she would prefer that we choose something for her at the jeweller’s here.”

My mother, half-ashamed, made some demur at first, but with no sincere resistance, for she ended by accepting the ten guineas, saying, with a blush, she thought the little shops of Falmouth could possess nothing worth buying.

After this she asked languidly for lunch,

or "tiffin," as she called it. When it came she found everything detestable; nevertheless, she ate with a good appetite, and then we started in Miss Tremaine's carriage for Treganowen.

CHAPTER X.

AT the great oak door, the grand entrance at Treganowen, my father met us, and I remember I felt proud of his manly figure and handsome face, and perfect courtesy as he received us. He kissed me as I descended last from the carriage, and there was a trembling softness or tenderness in his voice which spoke to my heart, overflowing if with a flood of joy and gratitude as I felt the comforting assurance that here at least I was loved, here I should not crave for bread and receive a stone.

My mother, saying she was tired to death, flung herself on a couch in the drawing-room placed opposite a blazing fire. Here she was divested of her hat and numerous cloaks

by no less than three servants, who attended with assiduous devotion to her wants.

Miss Admonitia and my father paced up and down the terrace in earnest conversation, but in a few minutes I was surprised to see her re-enter her carriage and drive off.

"Surely," I thought, "she might have wished me good-bye. I have lived with her for seven years, yet she is gone without a word."

Habit is a link which cannot be broken without a pang, even if no love entwine it. As I watched the departing carriage I felt my heart tighten, and, like the prisoner too late set free, who, pines for his cell, I longed painfully to be back again in one of my safest, loneliest haunts at Treval. There was no peace, no loneliness here. The house was full of servants, some of them Indians, who looked cold and strangely forlorn, while the others regarded them evi-

dently with a superstitious dislike. Jostling each other on the stairs and passages, screaming and talking, in every room arranging and unpacking newly-arrived luggage and furniture, these numerous retainers appeared to me only to add to the confusion and discomfort that reigned everywhere. Lonely, in an empty upper room, I leant against the window-sill, letting the unconscious tears roll slowly over my cheeks as I felt myself a stranger and an intruder in my own home. No one asked for me, no one disturbed me, till at last two or three men, and a brisk servant-girl with a red face and an impertinent nose, entered in furious haste.

"La, miss," she cried, starting back as she saw me, "you must go away, please; we wants to put the carpet down here."

"Where am I to go?" said I, forlornly.

"Where arree to go?" repeated the girl;
"I don't know, not I, but there's rooms

enough in this wisht ould place for a young lady to sit in, without biding here to hender workpeople."

I departed without another word, and wandered desolately through the house, peeping into rooms where strange servants were eating and drinking, where strange men had jugs of beer upon beds, and bread and cheese on the backs of mirrors laid flat; where dirty, over-tired men were sitting on piles of carpets, and gossiping women of a slatternly aspect and wondrous volubility of tongue, belonging unmistakably to the charing tribe, stood chattering, pilfering, working.

All this was such a contrast to quiet, orderly, stately Treval, that my nerves felt rasped, and I shrank away frightened. I was a child of reckless hardihood in some things, yet timid and shy to painfulness in others. Above all, I dreaded strangers, so no wonder I fled before this host, and took

refuge in the quietest corner of the huge mansion.

I know Treganowen well, having roamed over the place so often in my visits to it with Miss Mildred. Then there was a quiet mystery here which I had liked. The desolate reception-rooms, with their covered carpets, piled furniture, and closed windows, had a charm for me, and it was with subdued step and whispering voice I roamed then through the uninhabited chambers, gazing in the gloom with a pleased fear at the old portraits, half-believing their eyes followed me with lonely wistfulness as I left them. This is how I had ever seen Treganowen, with a quiet so intense reigning over it, that the murmur of a solitary voice or the sound of a closing door echoed through its empty halls with a painful jar on my strung nerves. Now discomfort, noise, and dust had broken in upon this quiet like an invading army, and the one trim figure that could have

soothed me was absent. Nowhere in the confusion could I discover the pink shining face, the snow-white mob-cap and apron, and mittened arms of the kind old house-keeper, Prudence White. I had passed into a dozen rooms and fled from the curious stare of many strange faces without seeing her; so giving up the search, I crept down into a leafy conservatory that stood at the back window of the drawing-room, forming one side of a court, paved with a mosaic of marble and serpentine, and surrounded by pillars wreathed with creeping plants. On three sides beneath the pillars and the light roof they upheld ran a sheltered walk lined with flowers, while in the middle of the court a fountain played, adding by its ceaseless music to the ineffable quiet and charm of the place. Tradition said Treganowen was built on the site of an abbey, and on this spot had stood the cloisters; if so, the holy charm, the soothing tranquillity that

hovered here might be some lingering shadow of its old sacredness.

I entered this court from the garden, and with silent footfall crept inside the conservatory, and sat myself down among the flowers. Their delicious perfume, their shining leaves, the dashing spray of the fountain, and the quiet shadow of the great bay-tree which hung over it, all soothed me. The holy calm of the place grew into my spirit; my hot restlessness, my fevered longings subsided into gentle beatings of the heart, and a great calm fell upon me, which was like a dream without its attendant sleep.

I had sat thus a long while, with my head leaning against a pillar among the large leaves of a twining passion-flower, when a slight rustling noise aroused me. I looked around, but could see nothing save the spray of the waterfall, which dashed upwards into the sunless air, or fell upon the glass like the tap of a viewless finger. Thinking

this was the sound I had heard, I let my head sink again among the rustling leaves, and called back to my dreaming eyes the broken vision of my reverie; but again the rustle dispelled it, and this time I knew it was a breath and a footstep. Hiding with instinctive shyness from a stranger, I sat perfectly still, only glancing between the leaves into the glowing drawing-room. All within looked like a picture on which a warm light rose and fell fitfully. Wrapped in cachemires which trailed from the sofa to the carpet in rich soft folds, my mother lay sleeping, while the sheen of the huge fire fell in warm light and shadow on her pale, delicate face, and lighted up one bare rounded arm with a dazzling whiteness. On this a flashing gleam, now disappearing, now shining out again, as from a circlet of dull fire, showed me that, before falling asleep, my mother had gathered up the sleeve of her dress, and arrayed her pretty

arm in Miss Mildred's gift. Perhaps she had dropped to sleep in contemplating the brilliant gem, for the arm lay across her bosom, and a half-smile parted her lips. I took in every detail of this glowing picture in a moment, even to the full-length portrait of a thin, sinister Treganowon which hung on the wall opposite the sofa, and whose face, in deep shadow above the firelight, seemed to scowl down darkly on my sleeping mother.

For a moment this was the quiet picture of home and rest which I saw. Another moment, and a man had crept out of the gloom beyond the hovering light of the fire, and, advancing with noiseless step to the sofa, bent eagerly over the sleeper. In my terrified expectation I heard her quiet, measured breathing, and the hurried gasping respiration of the man; then he seized her by her white arm, which lay with such dainty softness on the cachemire folds, and

shook it, not roughly, but still with a strong grasp.

"Lucy! Lucy!" he said, in a sharp, hissing whisper.

My mother opened her eyes, gazed wildly on the man's face, and then, with a ringing, piercing shriek, started to her feet, only to fall senseless on the hearthrug.

CHAPTER XI.

A MUTTERED but fearful oath escaped the man's lips.

"All the rascally lot they've got will be on me in a moment!" he ejaculated. Then he stooped hurriedly over my mother, saying softly, "Lucy! Lucy! I am not going to hurt you. What are you frightened at? I am not such a fool as to tell our secret; what should I gain by that? Get you kicked out of this fine nest, I suppose," he added, glancing round the room.

There was no answer to his hurried words, upon which he took my mother by the arm again; but it was only a momentary touch, for the next instant he was on his feet, and, dashing through the conservatory

into the court, he fled out by the door that led to the garden. As he rose from his stooping posture over my mother, the fire-light fell brightly on his face, and, in spite of his workman's garb, I recognised the man who had seized me with such a hot hand four years ago at Treval. In his hurried escape through the conservatory he almost touched me, and, looking into my childish white face with a scowl, he stopped half an instant to clench his fist with a threatening gesture commanding silence.

All this passed in a duration of time that could easily be measured by twenty or thirty seconds; he had disappeared, therefore, before I could collect myself from the astonishment which had broken in so roughly on my tranquil dreaminess. I started up, however, now, and, rushing to my mother's aid, was by her side before the servants, whom her piercing shriek had alarmed, came to her rescue. Among them

was Mrs. Prudence White, the housekeeper, who, as they overwhelmed me with questions, gently lifted my mother on the sofa, and wheeled it to the window for air.

"What's the matter? What has happened?" was demanded on all sides; but I said nothing in reply.

I have observed that I was naturally a silent, shy child, experiencing a singular difficulty in expressing myself to strangers. It was now as if my speech had been suddenly locked, shutting up all words from my power; and besides this, I think, too, my disposition was inclined to secretiveness, and I preferred a musing, dreamy wonder over events to any elucidation that could be given me.

I turned away, then, silently from the servants' dull fright, and the commonplace explanation they were so glibly giving of my mother's swoon; and meanwhile her consciousness returned, and she, too, with

her hand on her brow, inquired what had happened. Then, apparently, recollection recurred to her suddenly, for she flushed crimson, and cast a terrified glance round the room. Seeing no one but a crowd of servants, she asked peevishly what there was to be alarmed at.

"It's we, ma'am, should ask you," replied the girl with the impertinent nose, whose acquaintance I had made a few hours before. "You screamed most awful."

"I was frightened in my sleep," answered my mother, "and I woke screaming. I was dreaming, I suppose. I was quite alone here, was I not?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, mamma," said I, coming forward. "You were quite alone, and sleeping on the sofa. I was watching you from the conservatory."

Again my mother's face flushed.

"Then it was you, Esther, who frightened me. You little white thing, gleaming out

there among the leaves like a spirit, you were enough to frighten any one, especially in this ghostly old nunnery of a place," she added, excitedly. At the same time a motion of her hand, an indescribable look in her eyes, plainly told me to be silent if I had seen anything.

The servants were all retiring, when she rose from the sofa, and, gathering her cachemires about her, suddenly exclaimed she had dropped her bracelet.

Every one looked for it, but in vain. On the sofa, on the hearth, among the folds of the shawls, the useless search continued, while my mother grew more and more angry every moment.

"Did you put it away before you fell asleep?" said Prudence White, softly.

"Mrs. White," said my mother, fiercely, "the last thing I looked at before I closed my eyes was my bracelet. And if it is not found, *I* shall know what to think."

Her cruel insinuation brought the pert girl from her knees—in which attitude she had been hunting the carpet—with a quick jerk to her feet.

“Ef you mean to say et’s stolen,” she cried, “I say as you are no lady to say et. I’ve lived weth ladies, *real* ladies born, not them as counted theirselves ladies because they married by good luck gentlemen high above their heads as the sun; and they’d scorn to take away honest folks’ characters—at sich a time, too, weth a houseful of moun-tebag Indguns, and blackamoors, and strange workmen.”

During this tirade my mother had evidently been too astonished, too furious, even to speak, but her eyes sparkling with fire and her clenched hands proved the passion of anger that moved her.

The girl’s last word, the single word “workmen,” had acted upon me like a revelation, and as my mother sprang for-

ward in blind anger, crying out hysterically her husband's name, I laid my hand upon her arm.

"Mamma," I said gently, "it is true what she says; there are many strange *workmen* in the house; one of these may have taken your bracelet."

She turned, and our eyes met; then she sank back trembling on the sofa, bursting into hysterical tears.

"Mrs. White," she said, "tell the servants to go. I am sorry—I didn't mean—there, there, I dare say you are right, and I shall find the bracelet somewhere."

The servants retired, not in the best of tempers, and Mrs. White gave me a very scrutinizing look as she left the room.

"Esther," said my mother, in a very low voice, as she hastily dried her tears, "did you see the—the person who frightened me?"

"Yes," said I.

"What did he look like?" she asked, raising herself on her elbow to examine my face in the firelight.

"Like a workman," I answered; "but the last time I saw him he was dressed like a gentleman."

"The *last* time you saw him?" repeated my mother in an amazed whisper. "Where did you ever see him before?"

"At Treval, four years ago. He is the same man that kissed me, and gave me that brooch."

"What are you saying, child?" said my mother in a tone of intense surprise and pain. And her lips were so white, she could scarcely form the words.

I repeated my statement.

"And he kissed you?"

"Yes," said I, with a shudder.

"He did not say that he had any right—I mean, he gave me no reason for this strange familiarity?"

"No, mamma."

"And you think he took my bracelet?"

"Yes," said I, "I think so because I saw him stoop and touch your arm."

"Then you are mistaken, Esther, for I have it in my pocket. I remember now putting it there before I fell asleep."

I recollected how I had watched the fire-light gleaming in the sparkling rubies as she lay sleeping, so I made no reply.

"Esther, did the man *speak* to me?" said my mother, after a moment of deep silence. She hid her face from me in the folds of the Indian shawl, but I saw her hands trembling as she tried carelessly to arrange her dress.

I repeated the man's words. "And he called you Lucy," I said.

She offered no explanation, she uttered not a word, but she seemed inexplicably relieved by my narration, and her manner, which I had divined rather than felt to

be warmer towards me, relapsed to its former coldness.

"You are sure that was all he said?"

"I am quite sure. And he called you Lucy," I reiterated pertinaciously.

My mother bit her lip, and I saw tears start to her eyes, but shading her face with the shawl, she gazed into the fire, and made me no answer.

The evening grew darker and darker around us, and the firelight danced upon her white face, and gleamed in the eyes of the sinister Treganowen scowling on us from the wall, as slowly the pale minutes went by in breathless silence. At last, shading her brow with her hand, my mother turned to me, and broke the painful stillness. She spoke in a careless tone, but my magnetic and sensitive nature too sharply sympathized with the real terror it hid to be deceived for a moment.

"Esther," she said, "this is a matter of

no consequence; still I do not wish you to mention it to any one"—she paused—"and particularly to your father. You must give me your solemn promise you will not name it to him. Miss Admonitia said you were a girl who could keep a secret. Now I shall see if that is true, and if it is, I will give you five of these guineas."

My mother opened her purse as she spoke.

"Oh, mamma!" I cried, as my heart bounded against my side as though it had been stabbed, "do not offer me money, I implore you. I will keep your secret, I promise you I will. I can keep a secret well. I will not tell papa."

"You are a strange, prying little thing, Esther, I think," said my mother, suspiciously. "What were you doing in the conservatory?"

"I only went there to be quiet, mamma."

"Well, I expect you to be quiet now,

Esther. I don't want to ruin a poor working man, and perhaps deprive him of his bread; that's my only reason for asking you to be silent. I don't believe he was the person who gave you the brooch, but I shall drive over to Treval to-morrow, and tell Miss Mildred what you say."

"Lucy," said my father, opening the door that led into the hall, "do you know dinner will be ready in half-an-hour? Are you going to dress? I think it is scarcely worth while on this first day, when all things are still in such confusion."

"Yes, yes, I shall dress," answered my mother in a pettish tone. "Emma has unpacked my things by this time. There, I do wish you'd shut the door and come in or go out, whichever you like best; there's such a draught."

My father shut the door, and we heard his retreating steps across the hall.

"Colonel Treganowen is so disagreeable and tiresome," said my mother.

Then she gathered up her shawls, and prepared to leave the room, but at the door she turned nervously towards me.

"Which way did that workman go, Esther?" she asked.

"He went out by the arched door in the court that leads into the garden."

"Well, come upstairs with me; I feel a little afraid."

She took me by the arm, and I accompanied her to her room, where a blazing fire, and shining lights, and two pretty soft dresses, and jewels laid out on the bed for her to choose from, and her maid with a bright sash hung over her arm, awaited her. She threw herself into an arm-chair by the fire, and then sent me alone to the other side of the house to my own room, telling me I had better order some tea for myself,

as it was too late for a child like me to have dinner.

My father, however, as I sat crying in the dark, came to me himself, and waited while I bathed my red eyes. Then, taking my hand, he said softly—

“Never mind, Esther. Tell me everything, and rely upon me always.”

CHAPTER XII.

My mother looked very pretty in her pale lemon-coloured dress, which suited her peculiar complexion of clear olive, and set off the lustrous black of her abundant hair. She wore an aigrette of diamonds in her shining tresses, and as these flashed and sparkled, and her white neck and arms gleamed in the light, I gazed at her with intense admiration. Still she was too much dressed for a home dinner with only husband and child, and the round arms, the slender fingers, the white throat, were overloaded with jewels. Unconsciously I felt the picture incongruous and wanting in taste, and I contrasted the glittering, restless image she presented with the pale,

tranquil figure of Miss Mildred. Then I perceived that, beautiful as she was, there was a nameless something wanting in my mother—a grace, a refinement which is to woman like the perfume to the flower, without which one is a gaudy disappointment, soon flung away, and the other a milliner's show, soon despised.

There was little conversation during dinner. My mother made no attempts to be entertaining. She seemed frankly and simply to be occupied in admiring herself. At dessert she played with her bracelets and rings, and placed her white arms in various attitudes on the dark mahogany with a sort of childish pleasure in their beauty which made me wonder at her. There was no trace of terror or of sorrow about her face, but a sort of languid weariness which increased almost to disgust as she grew tired of admiring her loveliness all alone. At last, with a sigh and a yawn,

she arose, enveloped herself in her shawls again, and lay down on the sofa to sleep.

Then my father drew his chair softly to mine, and began conversing in a low tone. He asked me many questions about Treval and its inmates, but I perceived his chief anxiety in all was to get an exact estimation of Mildred's feelings towards me and himself. I strove in vain to fix on his mind an impression of her kindness. I spoke of her unvarying gentleness, her sadness, her good works, her prayers and fastings, but I failed in all to convey to him any idea of an affection for myself. I was vexed at this failure, for I felt I owed her much gratitude, which by some subtle, undefined repugnance I could never pay. It was as though some invisible and shrinking cord within me drew me shuddering back whenever I approached Miss Mildred. I endeavoured in vain *not* to impart this feeling to my father; either he possessed it himself, or some hidden

nerve of his thrilled in sympathy with mine, for he suddenly threw his arm around me, and pressed me to him with much emotion.

"It is hard not to be able to protect one's own child," he murmured.

I scarcely think he was aware I heard him, for, putting back my hair, he gazed earnestly at me.

"I read plenty of courage on this brow, Esther," he said. "Happen what may, I see you will not be afraid. If you were a dove, child, fluttering above the folds of a snake, how would you escape?" he asked abruptly.

"I would flee away and be at rest," I answered, in the words of the Hebrew king.

My father was silent. It seemed to me as if he was meditating whether flight were possible.

"Is she indeed a saint? Can she forgive

such wrongs? O that I could see into Mildred's heart!" he exclaimed passionately.

The energetic words awoke my mother.

"Mildred's heart!" she said, with much irritation. "Fiddlesticks and rubbish! I'm sick of the subject. In India everything that was said or done had reference to Mildred, and now that we are near neighbours I suppose it will be ten times worse. If she is such a saint, it is a wonder to me she can't leave other women's husbands alone."

"Lucy!" ejaculated my father, in great agitation.

"Oh, yes, Lucy!" repeated my mother; "it's very fine to say 'Lucy,' like a tragedy king, but it's not so pleasant to feel oneself under the thumb of an old druidess, a bleeding nun, a pious ogress, or whatever she is. I've had my child taken away from me already; it won't astonish me at all if she

wants my husband next, or perhaps puts in a claim for Treganowen Towers and estate."

It is astonishing how near to the truth these brutally sensible, small-minded people come at times without knowing it.

My father seemed aghast at this language, and made no reply.

"Are you mad, Lucy?" he asked in a low, quivering tone.

"Mad? No; I am the only sensible one among you all. I eat, drink, sleep, and worry myself about nobody and nothing. By-the-bye, I forgot; here's a letter that old frump Addy gave me for you. Perhaps Mildred gives you a glimpse in it of that ancient fossil, her heart. If so, I'm sure I hope it will content you. I shall not be jealous, I promise you."

She drew the letter from her pocket as she spoke, and threw it on the floor; then pulling the shawls well over her head, she went to sleep again.

Truly my mother was not a woman to trouble herself about other people's sorrows, and as to respecting them, I believe if all the phrenologists in Europe had examined her head with their very best microscopes for a bump of reverence, they would not have found one.

Not without a pang at my heart do I thus speak frankly of my mother, although I am one of those who consider natural ties sacred and holy only when they prove the fountain-head of natural duties fulfilled, of love, gentleness, and tender care bestowed and returned; still, in spite of the logic of this truth, my pen will trace my mother softly when it can, save where the inexorable facts of the story demand a detail un-garnished.

I picked up Miss Mildred's tiny note and gave it to my father. His hand shook as he took it, and apparently the contents did not reassure him, for it was with an ex-

pression of pain that he turned to me and read the few words aloud :—

“MY DEAR RALPH,—I am grieved that I cannot comply with your wish for an interview. Believe me, it would distress me too much. In very truth I am changed fearfully, and some old remains of clinging vanity, some faint lingering of old feelings, will not permit me to let *your* eyes mark the ravages of time and grief on a face you remember only in its youth.

“You will think more meanly of me for this confession, but I speak with this humiliating frankness that you may recognise the true cause of my refusal to see you. I am willing to suffer in your estimation rather than let an erroneous impression rankle in your mind, troubling your repose. You may despise the female vanity and weakness of my feelings, but at least now you will be

convinced that unforgiveness and hate are not among them.

"I am sorry Esther should have fallen on the ghastly skeleton in our house prematurely; but since it is so, be assured you have my full permission to relate the terrible history *how* and when you will. I would not play the ungenerous part of telling the father's tale to the daughter, coloured by my feelings. No, I have left her mind free and clear of all bias; speak of me, then, as you will. Sometimes in my solitude, shame, and pain, as I look back, I think that not even my worst enemy could condemn me as I condemn myself.

"Admonitia will tell you my wishes respecting Esther's future. Farewell.

"Your friend,

"MILDRED TREMAINE."

"You see," said my father, as his brow contracted, "she counts me as her worst

enemy. There is no peace, no forgiveness, between us even now, and there never will be. Mildred Tremaine have any lingering of vanity in her heart about me! Folly! folly! False! false!"

I was silent. A painful weight seemed to fall upon my brain, and a terrible helplessness, like the numbed fascination of the bird by the snake, crept about my heart. Each event, each word, only showed me some new link in the chain which bound me hand and foot, and laid me like a victim at Miss Mildred's feet. I had long known myself *hers*. I had known it by some inexplicable feeling which made me powerless in her presence. As a little child, in my most unruly moods I never dared to disobey her voice. Her tones, low and gentle as they were, crept over me like a cold touch, subduing all my faculties into fear and submission. And now, when this instinctive knowledge of her power came to me in this

new way, strengthened by her written words and my father's acquiescence, a dull shudder passed through my frame, and my nerves quivered as though the fire of some great misery were already burning in my veins.

"Esther! Esther!" said my father, in a quick voice, "you are dreaming, my dear?"

I turned towards him, and as my little white childish face met his gaze, I know he read in it the trembling appeal of my heart, for he took my hand—it was so small and thin it was lost in his—and, pressing it between both his palms, he whispered gently—

"Do not fear, Esther! No one shall hurt you, my poor child, while I live—rely on that. I was saying, my dear," he continued, "only you did not hear me, that I cannot tell you Alicia Tremaine's story just yet. You are too young——"

"I am no child, papa," I interrupted.

"I do not think I have ever been a child. I have never had any one to play with, so I could only read, and think, and wonder, and perhaps that is why I look so old, and laugh so little. We cannot laugh, you know, if we live alone; if I had a brother or sister——"

But my father did not let me finish. He released my hand abruptly, and paced the room many times before he returned to his

seat

"If what, my dear?" he asked absently.

"If I had had a playmate, papa, I think I might have been happier—nicer—not so old and ugly as mamma says I am now." My lips quivered, and I leant my face upon his knee before I went on. "But I have never spoken to a child, papa, in my life, except little Tom Pengrath, who weeds the flower-beds, and he knows nothing. Once I asked him what he thought about while he was weeding, and he said, 'I doesn't

think, miss ; I whistles.' Now I am always thinking, thinking, and never till you came, papa, have I had any one to tell all these thoughts to. At church I have seen little children, and, watching them, I have wondered if they had thoughts like mine. But I could not ask them. Miss Admonitia always held my hand in a tight grip as we went down the aisle ; and then the great, old-fashioned coach swallowed us up, and everything felt cold and dark as if I were in prison. That is why I am so grave and old, papa, and not like a child ; so you need not fear to tell me the story because of my age."

Why were there tears in my father's eyes as he looked down into my little weird white face and kissed it ?

"I have not treated you like a child, Esther," he said, and his tones trembled ; "and when I said you were too young, I did not mean childish ; I meant rather that our

own acquaintance with each other is too young yet. I should like to let you know me better before I unfold a history so painfully connected with myself."

"If it would grieve you to tell it," I answered, "I will wait, if it be for years; only I should like to hear it first from *you*——"

"I understand," interrupted my father, hurriedly; "you shall hear it, Esther, first from my lips."

A servant entered at this moment with the tea-tray, and the clatter of the cups awoke my mother the second time.

"What, Esther!" she cried, as she rubbed her eyes with some energy. "Is that you up till this time of night? Well, I don't wonder you are as wizen as a white owl, and as old-looking as Methuselah in a black wig! Go to bed, you little object, directly! It is just like you, Ralph, to keep the child up till she has no more complexion than a

mummy ! I'm sure I should never think there could be such a difference——”

My father interrupted her in some excitement.

“There, Lucy, my dear, never mind ! If you talk so thoughtlessly you will certainly annoy me very much.”

“I am to put a padlock on my mouth, I suppose,” responded my mother, pettishly. “I wonder you and Mildred don't lock me up in something to keep me quiet. A good tall clock-case, now—how would that do ? Though even then I dare say I should aggravate her by ticking ! There, there, Esther, that will do ! Good night ! Oh, get along, you little thing, do !—I don't want to be kissed ! You've dragged my shawl off my shoulders !”

With a swelling heart I turned towards my father, and received his consoling caress. Then I crept a little tremblingly across the great room, with eyes tear-blinded, and

fumbled for the door-handle, which would not turn for a moment in my slight fingers.

"Are you never going?" cried my mother, "you irritating child!"

I got out of the room, feeling the blood rushing like a hot sea to my head.

"I was determined not to like that child!" said my mother, in a hard tone, "and I don't?"

I heard the words plainly as I shut the door, and found myself trembling in the arms of Prudence White.

"Hush, my dear!" she said, soothingly; "try not to mind—it's only her little tempers. Cheer up, and you shall come with me to my room."

"Let me go," I whispered, as with a strange strength I undid the clasp of her hands. "I will go with you, but I'll say one word to mamma first."

I opened the door as I spoke.

"Mamma," said I, in a clear, calm tone, that sounded, even to my own ears, like an echo of Mildred's, "there are so many strange *workmen* about the house that I am afraid. May Mrs. White sleep in my room?"

There was a hurried rustling of my mother's rich amber silk, and she rose from the sofa and came to the door. Her face was pale, her lips apart and trembling; she stooped as if about to whisper to me, but she started back on seeing Prudence White.

"Mrs. White," she said, in her gentlest voice, "I shall be glad if you will sleep in Esther's room, if she wishes it; not that there is anything to be afraid of. You know it was Esther herself in the greenhouse who frightened me this evening, and my bracelet all the time was in my pocket. Little nervous thing, my foolish fainting-fit makes her timid. The workmen are all

honest, hard-working people, are they not, Mrs. White?"

"I firmly believe so, ma'am."

"Then, Esther, my poor little love, you *need* not be afraid; but do what you please about sleeping with Mrs. White," said my mother, as she stooped and kissed me graciously.

I let her lips touch my cold cheek, but I did not return her embrace.

She went back to the sofa, trailing her long Indian scarf on the carpet; and Prudence White shut the door, and, taking me by the hand, she went up the great staircase in musing wonder. As for me, I wondered no more. I thought I could read my mother's character like a book now, and from that hour she ceased to be a mystery to me. My thoughts and fancies no longer busied themselves about her, and the sea of love that had surged around her image

rushed back upon my own heart in a tide of contempt.

This was my first day at Treganowen—the first I had spent with my father and mother since I quitted them an infant seven years ago.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning my mother drove over to Treval, but she did not offer to take me with her, and I gazed sorrowfully after the departing carriage as I stood in the long wintry avenue with the dead leaves dropping at my feet. I knew she was gone to consult Miss Mildred, whom she hated and pretended to despise, but to whom, nevertheless, she now flew eagerly for advice and help. In my wistful reverie I followed her on her journey, step by step, into that pale presence. I longed to possess the fairy power of making myself invisible, that I might creep unseen upon their interview, and hear all they said, and thus lay bare at once all this torturing mystery gnawing at

my brain. It was this, I fancied, which kept up the dull incessant pain in my head which had never quitted me since the night I got out on the roof. On every side I was tormented by secrets, and admonitions to silence most oppressive to my heart, and dangerous to my imagination. I longed to escape from this gloomy labyrinth in which my young feet wandered darkly, but there was no help, no clue, anywhere. I was so lonely. I might stretch out my hands in vain, and beat the darkness in my despair—no loving voice would cheer me, no loving hand would succour me. The warning that bade me be silent was useless, superfluous. Whom was I to tell?—to whom could I pour out those heavy thoughts and fears? My father, my sole friend, was the one for whom my lips were the most strictly sealed, on pain of grieving, of injuring him; and except him whom did I care to tell? Except him I was utterly alone in the world.

O how lonely it was here at Treganowen ! A few days ago a thousand bright hopes hovered round the thought of my mother like a coming glory that was to warm my life. Now they had faded out, and were lying cold about me like a pall. It was ever, then, to be the same darkness. Down the vista of years through which I looked, I could nowhere see a green spot sunny with childish love or childish playmates—always the same solitude, the same creeping awe and mystery gathering me about. Thus thinking, I sat down on an old ash-root in the grey, cold avenue, and, leaning my head against the tree, while the wind whistled among its branches, I brought before my dreaming eyes a vision of myself. I saw a little weird child, with sad look of longing, and tiny clasped hands, wandering companionless from winter to summer, from summer to winter again. I heard the hushed footfall—so unlike the pattering

step of childhood—sounding softly, timidly, through the deserted rooms at Treval. I watched the gliding shadows coming and going on the lawn, on the western front, on the carved ceilings, and among them that one face of terror looming out white and ghastly on the blank wall. Then there rose before it the pale figure of Miss Mildred, shining from within a dim halo, while a glimmering death-white hand pointed ruthlessly to the murdered Alicia, who, shrouded in gloom, crouched at her feet, in shape like that creeping horror that had haunted me on the roof.

With closed eyes, I watched myself through that scene with an eager interest in it as if all were new to me, and I—not the actor, but a spectator—were actually witnessing some visible drama played before me. I saw the rustling paper, borne on the wind, travelling down the darkness to meet me. I saw again the horrible fascination

with which I read it, the hand of fate that threw it at my father's feet, and the glad spring with which I rushed into his arms.

It was strange that all this seemed so far off now—stranger still that the occurrence of yesterday, which would have terrified so many children, did not rise among my visions, but seemed to me unworthy of a place amid my dreams of Treval. I only wondered vaguely what my mother's secret could be, dwelling on it at times with a shrinking repugnance, mingled with a contradictory instinctive satisfaction, like that a man feels in grasping a weapon, or in having a full purse. I knew, somehow, my knowledge of the man's theft would buy kindness and forbearance for me; and I was glad for this, but otherwise the matter did not trouble my imagination like the mystery at Treval.

Suddenly a sound disturbed my reverie, and, looking up, I saw my father pass by

on horseback. Gloomy and full of thought he did not observe the little shrinking figure seated on the ash-root, but went on regardless. Shivering now in my unnoticed loneliness, I drew my cloak around me, and watched him from between the trees. Soon he vanished, and seemed to me only like a dream in the midst of a dream.

Then my fancies changed, and, amid the uncertain sunshine piercing brokenly through the branches, I called up memories of my eccentric tutor, with his gaunt limbs, his long, lank face, and silent ways; and I laughed as I remembered my childish awe of him, and the trembling fear in which I coned my lessons, followed later by a dim consciousness that he, too, had an inner life of dreaminess and gloom, through which he saw me as through a mist, and sometimes painfully hated me. I let my thoughts gather about him steadfastly, with newly-awakened curiosity pondering on his life—

who he was, whence he came, and why he—evidently an Englishman and a stranger—should choose to live in a little sea-girt village of Cornwall. In Trevalla Church-town, save for the poor curate and his sister, a civilized man was companionless. Yet here this accomplished scholar, this erudite philosopher, had fixed his dreary abode for many years—how many I knew not. There was no intercourse between him and Treval, save on the days when he came to give me lessons, when Miss Admonitia saw him, and treated him with the profoundest respect; but he never beheld Miss Mildred's face, and he never ate or drank in the house. The decanter of wine and the cake and biscuits placed on the table invariably remained untouched.

I grew weary of him at this point, and dismissed his image from my mind with a wave of my hand. And, meanwhile, the day brightened warmer around me, broken

gleams of sunshine came down from the grey clouds, crowning the hanging wood of Treganowen with glory, starring my hair with gems, and sprinkling gold over the brown dead leaves lying at my feet. I stooped and gathered a handful into my lap.

“There are no fairies now,” I said, wistfully, “else, knowing how forlorn and weary I am, they would send one of their bright sisterhood to help me—a radiant figure bright with smiles, all dressed in green and silver, who would touch me with her wand, and I should rise up a fair princess, whom all the world would love. Mamma would not hate me then”—tears started to my eyes at this thought, and fell upon the leaves lying in my lap, with which my fingers played restlessly—“and I should not cry any more,” I said. “The fairy would give me all I wished for, and—let me see—for what should I ask first?”

And now as regards what followed I can never to this day tell distinctly whether I fell asleep in the midst of my childish thoughts, and saw it in a dream, or whether the long fever—of which I shall soon have to speak—then creeping on me, may not have already touched my brain. At all events, it seemed to me that, whispering clearly, coldly in the wind, the voice of Miss Mildred fell upon my ear—

“She shall never hear the name of him for whom we destine her. She shall never see him till I choose.”

And I instantly demanded of the fairy that I might hear his name, and see him to tell him that I hated him; and I asked that, in all Miss Mildred so tyrannically resolved concerning me, her hopes might wither like these dead leaves.

Then mournfully from without their rustlings came the answer of the fairy—

“Oh, unhappy one, child of sorrow,

shrinking from atonement, take thy wish, though it be evil. Weave a garland for thy bridal of these yellow leaves, and watch over the dead like Mildred. In the garland is his name."

A sudden chill passed over me, and I awoke with a start from the fevered imaginings or dream in which I was plunged; yet, moved by some superstitious feeling, I obeyed the voice, and, by gathering up the leaves in my lap, I fashioned them roughly into a wreath, with which I crowned my garden hat. Then I grew very tired and cold, the dull aching in my head became more intense, and, leaning my forehead against the tree, I closed my eyes as if to shut out the pain, and then gradually I forgot all things.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE sound of wheels and whispering voices aroused me, yet I did not uncloze my eyes, but in the luxury of partial rest, partial relief from pain, I listened.

"Stephen, you shall not go a step farther, Mildred would never forgive me."

"Is that Miss Treganowen sleeping there in the cold?" asked a young, clear, manly voice. "Truly, if you don't take better care of her, our marriage will partake too much of the Capulet and Montague order, and I shall have to seek her, like Romeo, in the vaults. I think I shall go and take a peep at her. Is she handsome?"

"No, indeed," answered the voice of my mother.

But the speaker had not stayed for an answer. He urged his horse a few paces in advance of the carriage, and, with one hand on the old ash-trunk, he bent low from the saddle and looked into my face. I opened my eyes slowly, and met his for an instant, and then closed them again.

"Do not wake her," said Admonitia, in a low, eager tone. "She is in one of her dead slumbers, and if you are cautious you may look at her without fear. I have seen her sleep for hours like that at Treval," she continued, as if speaking to my mother—"a strange, odd sleep, in which——" But here the murmur of voice and step showed me they had descended from the carriage, which rapidly drove away, and were walking up the avenue towards the house.

The young gentleman took instant advantage of their departure.

"You are not asleep?" he said, softly.

"No," I answered. And now I felt a burning glow suffuse my face.

"Then suppose you open your eyes again," he whispered, laughingly.

I did so, but without looking up.

"Oh," said the young man, laughing again, "if you don't look at me, you can't tell how you like me, and I'm dying to know."

"I can tell you that without looking at you," I answered in a low voice.

"Indeed!" replied the gentleman, sarcastically. "Then pray oblige me with an avowal of your sentiments. Don't you perceive the dreadful state of anxiety I am in? Do say you love me!" and he folded his hands in mock entreaty.

"I hate you!" said I, in a tone as intense and concentrated as my childish voice would permit.

"Ha, ha! do you really?" cried the gentleman, with a burst of merry laughter.

"This is rather good, 'pon my honour. Don't you know, young lady, that one day I'm to be your lord and master? Ah, I've done it now," he added, as if to himself, with a shrug of his shoulders, and a glance at the retreating figure of Miss Admonitia.

"It does not matter," said I, in the grave manner of a staid age. "I knew it before, and your assertion makes no difference whatever to my feelings. I should hate you all the same. You will never be 'lord and master' of mine, as you insolently express yourself. You think me a child, I suppose; but you are mistaken; I expect I know a great deal more than you. You don't look very clever."

"Doubtless your learning equals your politeness, young lady," remarked the gentleman, as he bit his lip slightly. "And suppose now I return the compliment by saying that I don't like you?"

"Sir, you are welcome," said I, with a supreme curl of the lip.

"Whew," whistled the gentleman, "there's a nice little spirit here to tame, I declare. Oh, you'll talk differently, you know, when I have you quite under my thumb."

I raged at this, and could scarcely contain my passion; but when, raising my eyes to his—a full flash of fire in them—I caught his laughing face, so fresh, and handsome, and gay, mocking my anger, my lips trembled, the emphatic "Never!" died on my tongue, and drooping my head on my hands, I burst into tears.

"Is it possible so learned, so composed a young lady can cry?" said the mocker, wickedly.

I cried on without heeding him, a great bitterness swelling up like a sea into my thoughts.

"Come, come," he said, "I didn't mean

to tease you till you cried. Don't be alarmed. I am not an ogre to carry you off and eat you, or a Bluebeard to run away with and marry you. I have not the slightest intention of doing it. My old fairy godmother, Admonitia, may hammer her admonitions into my head till doomsday, yet she won't succeed. No, there is a sweet, pretty little girl at Clifton growing up for me, whom I mean to have when she is old enough ; so tranquillize yourself, little one, and gratify your pretty little malice with all the hate you choose ; it won't hurt my adamant heart, my love."

He adjusted the voluminous folds of his neckcloth, and looked down on me magnanimously. Mortified, and my heart swelling with pride and grief, I still rested my aching head, my burning face, upon my hands, and cried on silently.

I believe he grew uneasy and restless under my continued tears, for after a

moment's pause he said, in a voice that had lost its mocking tone—

“Come, what shall I give you to dry your tears?”

“Nothing,” I sobbed, “only go away.”

“Well, I'll bring you something from Bristol, the next time I come. What shall it be—a doll?”

“I am too old for dolls,” said I, and a little sunshine began to appear through my tears, so amused did I feel at the question.

“Too old! Why, you are a tiny little creature! You are not more than ten, are you?”

“I am thirteen,” said I, with some dignity.

“Thirteen! Why Alice—that's the pretty little girl I told you of, who is growing up for me—is thirteen, and she is as tall—as tall as this.”

He put his riding-whip against the tree

to mark the height he meant. I instantly noted the place, and mentally resolved to measure my own height against it the moment he was gone.

"Well," he continued, "since you and Alice are the same age, I will ask her advice as to what I shall bring you."

I immediately grew contemptuous at the thought.

"As if a town girl," said I, "who does not know an oak from a rush, could possibly tell what *I* should like!"

He laughed again. "Oh, my little sweetheart is very clever," he said; "she can speak French, and play the piano, and sing beautifully. Can you do that?"

"No," I answered with a quick blush; "but I know tin from copper, and granite from schist, and I dare say she doesn't. And I shouldn't pick toadstools for mushrooms, or walk down a shaft with my eyes

open, and that's what a man from Bristol did here not long ago."

"Upon my word," said the young gentleman, with a merry laugh, "you are rather too Cornish for me."

Nevertheless, I saw by the gleam in his eye that he was not ill-pleased with my speech.

"So you do know tin, eh?" he continued, copying the Cornish accent in a way no Englishman can. "Well, in reward for that, as I like to see the old Cornish fire blaze up sometimes, you shall choose yourself what I shall bring you. Quickly say, for here is my most respected godmother directing her grim countenance to this quarter."

"Bring me Spenser's 'Faerie Queene,'" I faltered hurriedly.

"Ah!" said the astonished gentleman, gravely; "of course, exactly the book such an elf as you would choose. You are lately

from Elfin-land yourself, I believe. I see you have told me your age backwards. You mean you are thirty-one—what am I saying?—thirteen hundred and thirty-one, I should say. Permit me to apologize,” he added, taking off his hat with a mock bow, “for having treated one of the little people with such disrespect. I ought to have recognised from the first that I was speaking to a tiny brown pixy of unknown antiquity.”

At this moment Miss Admonitia had advanced so near us as to be almost within hearing, and the laughing gentleman, putting up the tablets hastily on which he had noted my request, held out his hand to me.

“Well, my little enemy, will you shake hands on condition that I promise and vow never to put you under my marital thumb? I give you my honour I won’t have you.”

"It is I who won't have you," I replied, rather ruffled. "I refused you the first."

"I deny that," he laughed, looking at me curiously. "However, I promise you that you shall refuse me—when I ask you."

He took off his hat with a low bow, all his chestnut curls glistening in the light, and turned his horse to greet Miss Admonitia and my mother, who had joined her.

"What have you been saying to Esther?" asked the former in a sharp tone. "I told you not to awake her."

"My most respected godmamma," replied the saucy youth, "I have said nothing to her beyond naming you as a sort of fairy who presided over my birth, and provided me with a grim old tower and a wife. I presented myself, therefore, as a man having authority over her—as a husband, in fact—and she treated me accordingly—that is, with the utmost impertinence. We shall

make a charming couple; we hate each other already."

My mother laughed musically, but Admonitia's face flushed, as it always did when she was vexed.

"What if Mildred heard you?" she said.

I glanced at the young man with a sort of triumph as I marked, by the sudden change in his face, that he too felt and acknowledged the wondrous power of that strange, shadowy woman.

"But Mildred does not hear me," he pleaded, "and I respect her feelings too much ever to permit her to hear me. I should not have teased Esther if she had not told me the child had inadvertently read some letter which gave her an inkling of my cruel design to gobble her up, body and soul, as soon as she is old enough"—here he shook his "marital thumb" at me as though to bid me keep silence as to our mutual renunciation of the agreeable bar-

gain—"and so I thought a little fun would not matter."

"You are a silly boy," said Admonitia, "and I daresay you have done harm with your nonsense. It was nothing but curiosity which made you insist upon coming with us, or rather watching for us on the road, and then following us hither."

"And very natural," said my mother, taking his part.

I perceived by the gleam in her eyes that she was glad he should see me thus at disadvantage, in an ugly, unbecoming brown frock, thick garden shoes, my hair disarranged, and my face disfigured by crying. I resented her feeling, not his words.

"Is it natural, then, to him to be impertinent, and curious, and disagreeable?" I asked passionately, as, twitching my hat from my head, I began to tear from it the garland of dead leaves I had twisted around the crown.

"Did you ever see such a child?" asked my mother, with sparkling eyes. "Some people think they can bring up children better than their own mothers can, and this is the result."

Save for a glance of fire from Miss Admonitia's eyes, no heed was taken of this innuendo.

"Oh, her disposition towards myself is charming," said the provoking young man, making his horse caracole before me with many antics to prevent my retreat. "It's a delightful little arrangement you have all made between you for our mutual happiness. It will be sure to succeed—such plans always do, you know. Just ask her how much she likes me."

I looked round at them all, and into my child's heart, inexperienced as it was, there crept a sense of their cruelty, not only in disposing of me as a victim bound hand and foot, but in making sport of a poor, helpless,

unloved little creature, defenceless in their grasp as a bird in the hands of the fowler.

"I hate you all," said I, with flashing eyes; "and if I am strange, and weird, and old, as this *boy* says I am (I did not choose to call him a man), whose fault is it? You have brought me up as you chose, and it was your choice that I should learn nothing to make me glad or young. Take care!" I screamed, as the pain of which I had been conscious all day ran sharply through my forehead—"take care, lest, having tried to make me a witch, you succeed too well, and I turn round, and blight and mildew you all." Then I added in a calmer voice, "If you think to dispose of me just as you please when I am grown up, you are mistaken."

In the sudden lull of astonishment and silence I walked away without looking at them again, no voice bidding me stay; but when I had got half way down the avenue,

the sharp trot of a horse made me start aside, though even then without looking around.

"Miss Treganowen," said the voice of Admonitia's godson, "I am come to bid you farewell, and to ask your pardon. I thought I was teasing a child—a child unusually young and childish for her years. I see I was mistaken, for something has made you unnaturally aged, Miss Treganowen, and I am sorry I have hurt your feelings. Can you forget it?" He put out his hand frankly, and I took it, the tears starting to my eyes. "You look ill," he said kindly, still holding my hand. "If there is any one within those grim old towers who loves you, go to her and be taken care of." Then bending low from his horse, he added in a still softer voice, "I admire your spirit, Miss Treganowen. I am exactly of your opinion. I don't intend to be disposed of either. Don't change,

there's a good girl, and we shall yet get out of the labyrinth; there is no chance of happiness for us else; the whole scheme is absurd. I'll not forget the 'Faerie Queene.' What a mistake I made in thinking you ten, little Titania!"

He relinquished my hand suddenly, took off his hat, and galloped away. And now I could not resist turning my head, and, without knowing why, I was glad to see that he passed Miss Admonitia and my mother with only a bow, not slackening for a moment the speed of his horse. I watched him till the great trees of the avenue hid him from sight.

CHAPTER XV.

ON entering the house his image still pursued me, and I wandered restlessly from room to room—avoiding the one in which my mother and Admonitia sat—searching for some relief for my troubled thoughts. I had seen so little of my father that I began to think I had not even him for a friend, and a morbid wretchedness stole over me as I felt how lonely and forlorn I was. Leaning out of a window in this egotistical, miserable frame of mind, I perceived Miss Admonitia in the court with all the workmen around her. Instantly guessing her motive, and becoming interested, I listened with all my might.

“Are you all here?” she said.

"Yes," answered one of the men.

"How is that?" asked the lady. "There were seven of you yesterday, and I see only six to-day."

The men looked at each other, and then the master carpenter stepped forward.

"Well, mum," he said, "I'll tell 'ee how it were. A man comed to me, a ded, and a says, 'Comraade,' a says, 'you be going to work at Treganowen, I reckon?' 'Iss, sartinly I be,' I answers. 'Well,' a says, 'I haven't had arra spell of work for well-nigh 'pon three months, and ef so be as you'd taake me 'long of your peere, you'd be doing a poor man a bit of good, and you waient hurt yourself noways, I bla'.' So I 'greed, and a comed, a ded, but where a comed from, or where a es a-gone to, I caent tell, n't I, more'n tha dead."

"Oh! so he is gone?" said Miss Admonitia.

"Iss, he's gone, a es, and wi'out so much

as a word of good-bye to norra person here."

The other workmen now broke into the discourse, each one giving a different account of the missing man, but all agreeing that he was a stranger, and so clumsy at his tools that it was evident he had never served his time to any honest trade.

"Should you know the man again?" asked Miss Admonitia.

A mason replied he should, and two others said they thought they should, but the rest confessed that, having worked with him only one day, and then in another part of the house, they did not believe they could swear to him.

"Miss Admonitia," said I, from the window, "I could swear to that man anywhere."

"You, child!" cried the astonished lady, looking up. "Where did you ever see him?"

"I saw him——" said I, hesitating—
"hasn't mamma ever told you?"

"No."

Miss Admonitia spoke in an irritated tone, and, tapping her foot on the pavement, she murmured something about constant insincerity.

"I saw him—when he frightened mamma in the drawing-room; and it was he who gave me that—who kissed me, I mean, once at Treval."

Miss Admonitia's face, upturned to mine, changed beneath my words from its vexed red to deadly paleness. She was unable for a moment to master her emotion; then in a low, quick tone she asked if I had named this to my mother; and, on my answering in the affirmative, she exclaimed passionately that she had been cheated and betrayed into a course of conduct detrimental to the interests of her family. Then, apparently annoyed at her own unguarded expressions,

she dismissed the men in a few kind words, saying she thought the stranger was a poor tramp, or perhaps a gipsy; and, since he was gone *without* stealing anything, she, pitying his forlorn poverty, should not trouble herself to pursue him.

Upon this Miss Admonitia entered the house, and I was not surprised to find myself in a moment summoned to the drawing-room. My mother was in tears. and furious. She started forward on seeing me, and shook me roughly by the arm while she showered on me a storm of epithets which astonished me by their coarseness. I bore the shock without flinching, although she followed up the shake by a blow on the face which made me stagger. Crimson with confusion, pain, and anger, and my very heart breaking within me at the thought that this was the mother for whom I had prayed and wept through all my motherless childhood, I yet had strength to turn and ask Miss

Admonitia in a calm voice why she had sent for me.

To my astonishment her eyes met mine full of tears, and, rising from her chair hastily, she undid the hot clasp of my mother's hand from my bruised arm, and placed her by main force on the sofa.

"Lucy Polwhele," she said, in a tone of withering contempt, "it was in vain seemingly that Mildred and I married you to a gentleman. You are the same ill-tempered, low woman that you ever were. The pert sempstress of the Plymouth garret dressed in finery on Sundays—wasn't it sometimes stolen finery?—was ever peeping through the rich apparel of Miss Polwhele, the belle of Penrhyn, and now not all the diamonds and cachemires of Mrs. Treganowen can hide her. For shame!" she cried, while her eyes flashed with indignation. "Learn to control your unhappy nature better, or at least do not show it in ill-usage to your

child. Beware ! for if I relate this scene to Mildred, the whole of your present state will sink from you like some castle you may have built in the air."

My mother, who had been beating her hands together in hysterical weeping, appeared to think it best to calm herself. She commenced some broken protestations of gratitude, mingled with entreaties that Mildred might not be set against her ; but Miss Admonitia interrupted her sternly, and, turning to me, she took my hand and placed me in a chair by her side.

"Mrs. Treganowen affirms," said Admonitia, "that you never told her this workman was the same man who had that brooch in his possession."

I was silent, and after a moment's pause she continued—

"I need not say, Esther, that I know you have told me the truth. Perhaps Mrs. Treganowen forgot the circumstance,

unless she has reasons of her own for concealing it."

"My reason," sobbed my mother, "was that I thought Esther must be mistaken, for the man who gave her the brooch could not have been Paul, and it was Paul whom I saw yesterday."

"And why might it not be Paul who had the brooch? Are all his possessions acquired with irreproachable honesty?" asked Miss Admonitia, quietly.

"Because—because," cried my mother, with a sudden flush, "Paul is not a murderer, and the man who had that brooch was certainly one of the gang that murdered your sister Alicia."

"Miserable woman, full of vile secrets and wretched memories," cried Admonitia, with a sudden access of emotion before which my mother's smaller passion paled away, "you have a reason for that assertion which you will not tell me. But hear

me. I will bring the murderers of my sister to justice, and pursue Paul himself to the gallows, if I find he is in the remotest degree connected with those miscreants."

With a cry that rang through my ears, my mother sprang up only to throw herself at Admonitia's feet.

"You will not be so cruel!" she cried.
"You cannot do it!"

"Why not?" asked Miss Admonitia, holding herself stern and erect in spite of the clinging clasp of my mother's passionate fingers.

"Because I love him still—because he is the only creature that ever loved me. Through all my miserable childhood and youth, if he was wicked to others he was a guardian angel to me. What do you know of wretchedness?" she cried, with a sudden burst of fury, pale and terrible in its strength. "It is I who could tell you of suffering. You shall not touch Paul."

"Why not?" repeated Miss Admonitia, in the same impassive way.

"You will kill Ralph."

"Colonel Treganowen has supported deeper sorrows, and he still flourishes," said Admonitia, in a still colder tone, as she moved towards the door.

"You shall not go!" shrieked my mother, holding her dress with both hands. "I will tell Mildred; she will prevent you."

Miss Admonitia turned on her fiercely, the crimson flush hot on her brow.

"Do you dare to insinuate," she said, proudly, "that Mildred will not second every effort of mine to find Alicia's murderer?"

"No," said my mother, with a despairing courage like a creature standing at bay, "I say that the last person on earth whom Mildred wishes to find is the man who killed her sister."

"You are lying!" said Miss Admonitia,

with shaking lips; "but if it be true, I will do it alone."

And still she tried to move towards the door.

"No! no!" cried my mother, clinging to her now with both arms. "Forgive me for what I said! Have mercy on me!"

For answer, Miss Admonitia undid the passionate clasp that held her, and walked steadily across the room. My mother started to her feet; her eyes flashed hatred and defiance.

"You have had no mercy on me!" she cried; "I will show none to you. It was Paul himself who killed Alicia. I, wretched child that I was, saw him. Now tell Mildred from me, and see if she will touch a hair of his head."

I heard no more. The room swam around me, a strange darkness fell over me, a deadly sickness and sensation of being carried away to a great distance, and then all was a blank.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was November when I fell ill, and this blank continued for me all the winter through, till I woke one morning to feel the breath of spring wafted through the window, while the song of birds came with it, and the scent of a thousand flowers loaded it with balm. A sense of intense peace pervaded my being. I lay still and listened in a fulness of joy no words can tell to the song of a linnet perched amid the blossoms of a thorn whose branches touched the window-sill. All was so quiet that not a pin-drop disturbed the little songster, whose hallelujah rose to the blue heavens in clear thrilling notes, soft and musical as a streamlet's flow. I followed him note by note till he was still.

Then he flew away, but another and another took his place, while with enchanted ears and eyes tearful with joy I listened and watched.

Here was the bright goldfinch, arrayed like feathered king, there the garden warbler in russet and black, the speckled thrush and swart blackbird, with song sweet and clear as a running brook, and the tiny tomtit chirping his little loves in melodious jerks and catches that seemed to defy the very universe to follow him for joy and courage. As I lay in pleasant weakness listening, I wondered if all were real, or whether I had awoke in some far-off world which was not heaven, but so near it that heaven's angels, as they journeyed to and fro from star to star, on their missions of love, chose it for a resting-place, and shook beauty over it with lavish wing as their closing pinions softly descended.

Meanwhile the sunshine crept in farther,

and chequered my white bed with a glittering spectrum of my window, flecked with a hundred shadows of dancing leaves, that tapped friendly on its panes and nodded kindly to me in my weakness, adding their greeting to the linnet's song, while the bark of a dog joined heartily in their loving good-morrow, falling on my ear with a pleasant strangeness, like a new sound never heard before.

Soon other sounds came creeping in through the morning mist, and with them came faintly dim memories, not hurting me, but gently fanning my soul with refreshing thought, till gradually there broke upon my sense the knowledge that I had been long ill, but that danger and death were put away from me now. Claspings my thin hands together, I prayed and thanked God; but very weakly, very imperfectly did my few murmured words convey to Heaven the deep joy, the calm, the delight of existence, and

the ecstasy of praise that filled my being. I lay still another moment that the tears which had gathered in my eyes might go back to their wells, and then painfully I succeeded in raising my head from the pillow and looking around me.

Through the window I saw the green, smooth lawn, the waving trees, the budding thorn bursting into blossom, the glossy laurels glittering with a sheen that closed my languid eyes, the soft hue of the spring foliage on the chestnut, sycamore, and beech, and over all a canopy of ethereal blue, pearled with clouds, and set with that resplendent jewel the morning sun. The balmy atmosphere was laden with spring odours, and filled with sunshine that seemed its very self and yet not itself, but rather its bright spirit, that steeped it in rejoicing, and vivified it into a full glory of life and light. With a swelling heart, beating warm with the joy of my new birth to health

and loveliness, I breathed this beauty into my very being, and made it a part of myself. For what we have once seen and once loved with a true worship is for ever after a portion of our souls—our very own—a part of that mysterious inheritance which, while we live, we are ever enriching or impoverishing, that heritage which we call *self*, which we water with tears, sun with laughter, comfort with hope, and strengthen with faith against the blights of grief and sin, till the great Steward of our souls puts forth His sickle—we call it death—and requires of us the account of our harvest.

That blue, sunny sea answering the sparkling breeze by a shower of diamonds flung upwards as in play, seemed not too mighty, not too deep to be a type of the unfathomable thought, the boundless bliss of my young spirit, as she, too, rejoiced in her creation, and, floating down the waves of time, sparkled in the sunshine and joy of

life. Gazing out on the picture framed by my window, I could not tire of its beauty, ever changing as it was, with something new creeping into it. Now a white sail crossing the disc and departing, now a flying bird like a passing spirit; a butterfly like a winged flower, a gambolling spaniel, or the shadow of a fleeting cloud—all these changed the picture's aspect every minute, and fixed my smiling wonder. Turning away my head at last, I encountered the calm grey eyes of Prudence White fixed on me curiously. She was seated at a little round table on the side of my bed opposed to the window, and she had a bit of needlework in her hand. Her quiet, neat figure, so prim and nice, made another picture for me which my eyes gathered in with pleasure, and I looked at her and smiled.

“Miss Esther,” she said, and a sudden change came over her face, “are you better?”

"Yes, much better," I answered. But my voice sounded so weak and low to my own ears that I was startled with a vague surprise.

"Thank God!" said the kind old house-keeper. And dropping her work she clasped her hands, while tears started to her eyes as she looked up in thankfulness.

"Don't cry, Prudence," said I, faintly.

"No, miss, I won't, but I'm so glad!" Saying which, the good soul raised her apron to her eyes under the pretence of wiping them, while in reality beneath the cover she shed a copious shower of hearty tears. Then bustling away for a moment she came back with a cup of broth, which seemed to me the veriest nectar ever tasted by mortal.

"We must lie down again now," said Prudence. "But first look here, Miss Esther: here's something to make you laugh."

She pulled back my curtain as she spoke, and displayed the slumbering figure of the pert-nosed servant-girl lying all of a heap on the floor, rolled up in one of those many-caped great-coats then worn by gentlemen.

"There, that's what master gave her to keep her warm, and the way she curls herself up in it would be a lesson to a hedgehog," said Prudence. "Bless you, Miss Esther, she'll sit up for any number of nights, and never feel sleepy till sunrise, and then she blinks like an owl, and drops."

Here the girl suddenly opened her eyes, and perching herself on one red elbow, she regarded me with great astonishment. I smiled at her comical face, which seemed to increase her wonder to an enormous extent.

"Well, gawk," said Prudence, with sundry winks and nods, "what arree staring at now?"

"Are you glad to see me better?" I

asked. "Look: I have eaten a full basin of broth."

"Lor!" said the girl. And whole sentences strung together could not so strongly express surprise as did this simple exclamation. As I looked at her wide-opened eyes, and her countenance stupefied as at the sight of a miracle, I could not help laughing.

"Why, what is the matter?" I asked. "You look as if you were out of your mind with wonder."

This speech of mine completely upset the girl's gravity.

"Well, I never!" she cried. "I look out o' my mind, do I? O lor, Mrs. White, that I should live to hear missee say that as grave as a judge! I be the waun that looks out o' my mind, be I? O lor!"

Here she rolled to and fro in a fit of interminable laughter, in which Prudence could scarcely refrain from joining. Stop-

ping at last, she looked at me with an expression of patronizing benevolence and satisfaction.

“ Well, et’s a mericul,” she said, “ and a blessed waun. To think of her waking up all of a suddint as sensible as Solomon, and as peart as a magpie! Aw, Miss Esther, we’ve all bin wisht about ’ee, sure enough, and a fine passel* of asnegers† we’ve had trapesing‡ and tarvyings§ down to Tregan-owen to pomster|| ’ee up; ees, fye, and narra waun of ’em able to do et. Sure, I feel scratchy¶ when I think of all they toatledum-patticks** chunking†† maaster’s cuyn‡‡ like ’taties. Aw, we’ve bin in a cruel taaking ’bout ’ee, Miss Esther, thic’s a fac’.”

“ I am very much obliged to you, Mary,” said I, “ for caring for me.”

* Parcel. † Blockheads. ‡ Wandering.

§ Storming. || Cure. ¶ Mad with anger.

** Complete simpletons. †† Swallowing. ‡‡ Coin.

"Hark to her now, the poor cheel-vean;* she don't know what I be caaled, and she's bin screeching 'Jenifer! Jenifer!' day and night till I wes skeered of my aun naame, I wes."

"Is your name Jenifer?"† said I. "That's a very old Cornish name, and one that a queen bore once in King Arthur's time."

"Please, Miss Esther, to lie down and be quiet," said Prudence, uneasily. "Don't 'ee begin 'pon they ould kings and queens jist yet; let their bones lie, do 'ee now, co."‡

I laughed a little, lay down as she bade me, and fell asleep. What a beautiful sleep that was, and how fresh and gay I felt when I woke up at midday! And there was my father sitting down by my bedside watching me, and a doctor was there—a pleasant

* Little child.

† A corruption of Guinevere.

‡ A Cornish term of endearment.

doctor with wonderful eyes, caressing, coaxing, and Cornish to the backbone. And steaming on the round table stood a little teapot, a crisp loaf, and a tiny pot of creamy butter. My father looked pale and thin, but he answered my smile with a look of joy beaming over his face like sunshine, and then he stooped and kissed me; whereupon the doctor with the merry eyes, declaring that was a very good example to follow, stooped and kissed me also; only he gave me two kisses instead of one, because he said he came second, a reasoning which made me laugh.

"Laugh on, Miss Esther," said the doctor, as he coolly installed himself at the round table and began pouring out the tea. "You require three things to make you well—laughter, food, and sleep—and I'm coming every day to see you have all three."

He brought me some tea as he spoke,

and a plate of thinnest bread-and-butter of his own cutting, and watched me eat and drink with a pleasure that rendered his merry face singularly handsome. I was very weak, but very glad and happy, and eager to talk.

"This tea is so nice, and the bread-and-butter is nice, and do you know, I think you are very nice, too," said I to the doctor, as I patted the hand so gently smoothing my pillow. A curious shadow—I should have said of tears had he been a woman—came into his merry grey eyes, and the kind hand I had touched stole around the cushion, supporting me with a comforting strength that made me fancy myself quite well.

"Poor little birdie," he said, softly, "how ill it has been!"

"And have you taken care of me all the time?" I asked — "you and papa?"

"Not all the time," answered the doctor, a little gravely.

"I wish you had been in Dr. Spencer's hands earlier, Esther, my poor child," said my father; "you would have been spared much suffering."

"I have not suffered anything," said I, smiling at the doctor, who was smoothing back my hair, and looking at me anxiously.

Somehow I did not feel in the least shy of him, and I suffered my childish head to lean upon his breast with all the confidence with which a bird nestles beneath its mother's wing. In my calm weakness I felt no curiosity about this new friend, but was content to enjoy his soothing presence without asking questions. When my tea was over, those kind hands laid me back gently on my pillow, and, looking alternately at his smiling face and my father's grave, earnest eyes, I fell asleep, and my dreams were pleasant.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER a few days, during which, save for intervals of hearty eating and drinking, I think I did little else but sleep, I was strong enough to leave my bed and lie on a couch by the window, where I enjoyed fully the beauty of the garden and the freshness of the sea. At length I reached the dignity of dressing, and slowly, hour by hour, as health returned, the waves of commonplace daily life gathered in around me, and I grew weary and inert, not being strong enough to take an interest in the petty ebb and flow of that dreary, monotonous sea, and still too sick to seek an interest elsewhere. One day I sat listlessly by the window, weary, sad, irritable. Ah! looking

back with these dimmed, aged eyes upon that fragile child figure, propped with pillows, with thin hands clasped and head bent forward, how well I can read now the cause of the dreary depression portrayed in each line of the bent form, of the pallid cheek, and quivering lip! And yet I could not read a word of that language then; my own heart was a sealed book to me. I lived only in imagination, and it was fevered food it gave me. Stones for bread, and scorpions for fish, and fiery thirst for water—these were the daily meals my enemy brought me, and yet I was content, hugging my hunger to me, and craving, ever craving, for the unnatural food.

Still looking back as on a picture, I see the little round table placed near the drooping child, and on it stands a large old-fashioned watch, ticking loudly, so loudly that I—no, not I, Esther the aged, looking back on life's beaten track, knowing all

things, and, above all, that nothing hath come to me more cruel than hath come to others, but I, the child, drooping before the unknown mystery of life, bending to the sorrows not yet come, shrinking on the brink of the flood I can feel though not see as fate drives me blindly on—I put forth my small hand impatiently and push the watch from me; and as I glance wistfully at the window through which these many days at an hour now slowly past—ten, twenty, thirty, fifty minutes since—I had been wont to see a kind face smiling, my head sinks lower, an intense, an unknown weariness pervades my frame, and I hide some strange pang upon my face with my clasped hands. Meanwhile, a figure that has come gently into the room steals behind me, and lays a parcel on my lap.

“Esther, you are sad to-day. Here is something that will drive away your precocious troubles.”

It was my father's voice, and I turned with a start and deep blush to meet him.

"What is it?" I said, as I laid my hand tremblingly on the packet.

"Open it and see."

In a moment the strings were off, the papers thrown aside, and there, in the full glory of green and gold, lay Spenser's 'Faerie Queene!' For an instant, and an instant only, I was bewildered. Then my face flushed painfully, and, like a wave, there came over me a rush of memory too strong for me in my weakness, for, falling softly back on my father's arm, I fainted.

When I recovered consciousness the glittering books were not in sight, and a week passed away before I gathered courage to ask for them. My father hesitated at first to grant my request, but finally yielded, bringing me the volumes with a strange look of uneasiness on his face. I asked no

questions, and he volunteered no information. I knew perfectly well from whom the gift came, without a word being said. My silence, however, misled my father, who now attributed my fainting to mere weakness, as he naturally imagined I could only suppose the books came from him.

Meanwhile, throughout this slow week, I kept my daily watch at the window, and listened to the loud ticking of the heavy seconds, as they went by on their leaden wings. It was no hero for whom I was looking and longing; there was no halo of imagination thrown around *him*. I *missed* the kind, familiar face—that was simply all. At last I told myself that now I was convalescent he had given me up, just as he would give up any other patient; and, disappointed, humiliated, I put away the loud-ticking watch, and, altering the position of my chair, I placed my back to the window.

It was not until years after this that I knew my kind doctor at this time was lying dangerously ill, in sore need of the gentle, attentive nursing he had so richly lavished upon me. My father and Prudence, in their anxiety for me during my weakness, avoided all allusion to him, and evaded the half-formed questions that died away on my tongue. Thus silently he faded out of my daily life in the same quiet, unobtrusive way in which he had glided into it. Well would it have been for me if that gentle, kind face could ever have been my daily comforter and help.

You may have observed that I have said nothing about my mother. It was a singular consequence of my illness that it made me avoid, or rather instinctively shrink from, certain persons and certain topics, my thoughts rushing back as they neared them with the same dread with which we flee

some visible danger. My mother was one of these persons, and I only approached her image in my memory gradually and with caution, my over-tried brain perchance warning me of peril if I ventured on this path. It was not that my memory was impaired; it was dormant, that was all. I felt that I could remember perfectly all that had happened if I chose to make the effort, but I felt also that it was better not to make it. I could plainly date the commencement of my illness from my adventure on the roof, but I put my hand on that plague-spot and refused to uncover it. Neither would I ask questions respecting the length and nature of my illness; only I knew it was November when I looked on that white, woful face, and the dead November leaves, like a funeral chaplet, still entwined my garden hat; and it was May leaves, May flowers, to which my senses had opened after their long sleep. But my thoughts wan-

dered round that blank darkness without creeping into it, or ever seeking to traverse this lost time which my sickness had swallowed up. This is the blank I told you of—the gulf which my after life has only rudely bridged over, not by any later knowledge of mine, but by the narratives of others.

On my recovery my father seemed a familiar figure that had flitted to and fro through many visions; and that other face, so gentle and kind, to which I clung so tenderly, appeared simply to have belonged to me all my life, and I smiled at the very thought of its ever having been new and strange. Not so my mother: hers was a vague image only to be recalled with pain, and it was the pert servant-girl who first forced me to shape out this image tangibly, and endure this pain in a more lasting form than a mere passing pang.

“Well, Miss Esther,” she said one day,

as her red face beamed with satisfaction, "you don't ask arter Crum'ell's dog." *

"Who in the world is Cromwell's dog, Jenifer?"

"Why your ma's maid that she brought from Indgee—aule Dominy Chitty, to be sure. And you don't ask after your ma either, miss."

I turned red, and then pale, with a strange sickness and fear, as this abrupt question stirred up too quickly in my brain the wild thoughts that my illness had for a time calmed.

"No," said I, with a deep sigh, "I had forgotten her. Where is mamma? How is it I don't see her?"

"Aw, my dear," continued Jenifer, pursing her lips tightly together, "et's much good the sight of her would do 'ee."

* In the villages of Devon and Cornwall, "Crum'ell's dog" is a term of reproach bestowed on obnoxious individuals.

"You must not say so to me," I interrupted wearily.

"Lor, et's much she cares for you!" cried Jenifer. "D'rectly the doctor says you has fever she traapeses off to Baath weth as many trunks as the Queen—a fine new man with a frizzled wig from Lunnun-Church-town 'long with her, Crum'ell's dog up behind, four 'osses, two houtriders, a parrot, and Fiddle-de-dee inside."

I could not help laughing, not only at Jenifer's curious arrangements of words, by which she put the horses and outriders inside the coach, but also at the ridiculous names she had bestowed on my mother's little spaniel, Fidelio, and her maid, Dominica Cetti, who was a Spaniard or Italian, whom she had engaged either in Syria or Egypt.

"And has not mamma been to see me once since I was taken ill, Jenifer?" I asked.

"No, but you've bin to see her, miss."

"I have, Jenifer!" I exclaimed.

"Ees, fye, my dear. You see, when you got better of tha fever, you weren't fitty at all en your head, Miss Esther, so your pa thought a chaange of air would maake et come en coose like, and we all staarts for Baath to try they waeturs, which a dog wouldn't stomach, and tha folks up there so proud and smaert you cain't spaake to 'em for emperance, and your ma not a bit settled, weth her faace paainted. Aw, my dear, she was a rale beauty, I can tell 'ee, and no more cares for her own child than a cuckoo. And a young miss weth her, fine and emperant she was, and a beauty too, they said; but I couldn't see et, n't I, thof I opened my eyes as big as cutch-laamps; and a forthy young gentleman en brave cloase, most like a play-actor he was."

"Was his name Stephen?" I asked faintly.

"Stephen! Iss, sure it were, and a deal more tacked arter it, like a kite's tail, and a 'Sir' stuck afore it. And that's all I know about 'un, so don't 'ee, for goodness gracious' sake, Miss Esther, ax me no questions, 'cus I don't know nauthen at all."

"And was the young lady's name Alice, Jenifer?"

"Lor-a-mussy, Miss Esther! you have give me a turn! I reckon 'twas maake-b'lieve all the time you was ill, and you do know all about et, don't 'ee, now?"

"I know nothing, Jenifer," said I, with deep sadness. "Tell me what you may tell. I see you are ordered not to let me know much."

"You be 'cute as a magpie, Miss Esther. Well, her naame was Alice, but as to her havage, or anything 'bout her, nobody knowed, and as I couldn't abide her, I didn't want to know. Dominy Chitty said she was a orfing that was put under your mamma's

care in Indgee; and ef so be as that's true, than a unbeknown orfing es more cared for than waun's own flesh and blood, that's all. I couldn't abide her, she so rosy and prinkt out, and you so white and wisht, never ating nauthen, and never slaeping. And aw, my dear, tha things you seed en they waakeful nights would maake a parson catch oop his coaets and run."

"What did I see, Jenifer?"

Jenifer looked round the room before she spoke, with an awe-struck countenance, but seeing nothing more terrible than the cat, plucked up courage.

"Well, miss, perhaps I didn't ought to tell, but there, as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. You seed, Miss Esther, a bucka which, sooner than I'd see, I'd be repped oop in lerrups or scat ento jouds; iss, fye, I would. You seed Miss Lishy Tremaine groping round your bed day and night. At laest maaster, who was as wisht as a coot,

wrote straight off to Miss Mildred, a ded, and he tould her all you said, and, 'stead of answering thic letter, Miss 'Monitia comes to Baath, and taakes you right off to Treval."

"To Treval!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Iss, fye, to Treval, because Miss Mildred sent word there warn't no doctor as could pomster* you, but she'd cure 'ee herself, she would, and so she did, sure enough."

"Miss Mildred cured me!" And my wonder was too great for words.

"She and the carneying doctor that Mr. Winterdale sent for to furrin paarts."

Here was a new surprise. Mr. Winterdale, then—my old tutor—knew Dr. Spencer, and it was by his agency this firm, gentle hand had so tenderly soothed away my sickness. But I passed over this strange news without a word of exclamation save

* Cure.

that expressed in a tightened breath and curious, silent wonder, while Jenifer triumphantly continued her narration:—

“Miss Mildred tooked 'ee in hand to once, but she sent me, and Prudence White, and our peer* back to Treganowen. And I've heerd say as you slept in her awn room, and she tended 'ee day and night, never leaving 'ee 'cept the hour that the colonel rode over from Treganowen to spend en your room, and then she allis went away, and Miss 'Monitia took her place. At laest the doctor—who maakes everybody like 'un with auney a wink of his grey eye, said you'd be well soon, and they'd better taake 'ee hoam, as you'd feel more nateral like at Treganowen when you comed to. So hoam you wes brought, laid upon cushions in the carriage, as wisht and white as a streak of moonshine, with tha doctor as tender-hearted

* Pair, a term used by miners to express a party of men working together.

over 'ee as a babby, resting your poor head 'pon his buzzom, coaxing, carneying, whispering till you was jest as quiet and as happy as a infant. Me and Prudence White wes in tha coach, and maaster riding 'long by the door, and we never tired of looking at thic picture, I can tell 'ee. I never see such a man as thic doctor, he does it all so easy——”

“What does he do easy, Jenifer?”

My voice was so sad when I spoke that it startled me.

“So easy that I'm 'most afeard of 'un,” said Jenifer. “He stringed up all our hearts like a score of pilchers, and went off weth 'em as light as a whistle. Miss Esther, I lets tha fire go out constant, 'cause of thic man, and his eyes es in my plate all dennar-time, and my vittles choakes me like fish-bones. If he warn't a gentleman, and I a poor girl, I'd foller 'un out to furrin paerts, and stand at his door all the day, aunly to

see 'un pass in waunce. Next to being a lady, Miss Esther, I should like to be a dog—*his* dog—there, thic's my feelin's, and now I've told 'em out I feels better." And here poor Jenifer regarded me wistfully, rubbing her red, coarse arm the while with nervous fingers. "And all he said 'bout you comed true," she continued. "A few days arter you was brought here, you waakes up as 'cute as ould Solomon hisself. Ah! how he used to bribe me to nuss you well!"

In spite of Jenifer's words appearing to say it, I knew it was not Solomon who had bribed her, so I simply said—

"What did he bribe you with, Jenifer?"

"He had a heap of bribes ready, Miss Esther, to give when you was better—a glad footstep, a sunbeam en his eye, a word like honey which fell down 'pon me, and wrapped me round like the scent of a flower. He paid me a hundred ways—a

glint of gould in his sunny hair, a laugh on his handsome faace, a touch from his kind hand, paid me; and less than that, Miss Esther, would have bribed *me*. For one of his long eyelashes I'd sit up a month of Sundays; for a pleasant word from his lips I'd travel over the world barefoot; and hungry, and poor, and forlorn, I'd die full of reches and joy if he aunly gaave me a thankful look. Ah, he's brimming over weth treasures, he es, which he waasties out 'pon everybody near 'un. O lor! O lor! why aint I a dog?"

Poor Jenifer put the corner of her blue checked apron to her eyes, and looked at me with a half-sorrowful, half-comical glance, in which her own strong common sense seemed struggling against the spell and power of this wonderful doctor.

"And where is he now?" said I, with hot cheeks. "I ask because he was so kind to me, you know, Jenifer."

"Gone to furrin paarts," said Jenifer, with a burst of tears. "Gone without a leave-taking; gone with a whistle and a song like a blackbird in June; gone like tha sun goes, with a promise of being back to-morrow, and, like tha sun, he's took tha daylight with 'un, and left tha night here. Why, he went so careless, saying he'd be back next day, I dunno—— Oh, Miss Esther! you who've sat continual in tha full feast of his presence, how you've got well wethout 'un in this cowl'd, dismal darkness, with narra soul in tha house to give your heart tha bit of bread it's hung'ring for, es more 'n I can tell."

Perhaps I could not tell either, but I uttered no word in reply. My heart and my imagination were already at war, and the battle was fierce. If Jenifer and I had known that our gentle doctor at this moment lay sorely wounded, and sick even unto death, hidden in the house of Mr. Winter-

dale, what then? Why, then I think a certain garland of dead leaves would have been flung out to the summer winds, and a green and golden book would have lost its magic. But this was not to be till I had gathered in my harvest of dust and ashes, and sat down in my desolation many days like the man of Uz.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I MUSED on this story of my illness which Jenifer related with many details, but by no effort could I remember my stay at Treval, or any other circumstance or person to whom she alluded as having been familiar to me during this terrible blank in my life. Strangely enough, however, now I dared to question myself, I found that all horror at the thought of that terrible figure I had seen on the roof had left me. I could think of it with a curious familiarity that removed all fear, and the mention of Alicia and her mysterious death no longer agitated me so cruelly. On the contrary, I felt an undefinable interest in her fate, and a longing desire to talk of her which I had never

experienced before; and added to this, by some link intangible to thought, there was a sick craving in my heart as for something I had lost. The singular idea possessed me that during this blank time of sickness I had enjoyed a larger, fuller life than these days of health gave me now. Things hidden and secret had been open to me; I had ceased to walk gropingly in darkness, battling with shadows, but had known even as I was known. Above all, that haunting duality, that impalpable, fleeing, flitting, second self, of which I have spoken as belonging to my strange, wayward individuality, had found a form—a voice in which it had spoken to me, and opened to my soul a new heaven and a new earth. As my thoughts dwelt on this fancy, hovering unconsciously on the threshold of that secret upon which my life was built up cruelly in blindness, all the love, all the yearning home affections, all the shut-up

tenderness of my heart, were stirred within me. More than ever now did I feel as though I—that other mysterious self—had come from some other world, where an atmosphere of love, of sympathy, of light had wrapped me about, which I was ever to search for here darkly and in vain.

In this mood, the craving to talk of Alicia Tremaine grew on me feverishly, but delicacy towards my father, anxious as I was to question him, prevented my pressing for the promised details of her story. I was obliged, therefore, to wreak my restless thoughts of her in a constant recurrence of her name in my conversations with Prudence White. The good housekeeper at first noticed this uneasily, but at last, one June evening, when we were seated together in a little room high up in the western turret, she suddenly asked if I should like to hear as much of Alicia's

history as had come within her own knowledge.

With a hot beating of the heart, mingled with the inexplicable feeling that I knew all she was going to say, I eagerly replied in the affirmative. In the few apologetic and introductory sentences with which I commenced this story, I told you I must present it to you brokenly, as it came to me—rough-shaped and imperfect, growing, as it were, into a building stone by stone. Hence I will not again excuse myself if I give this “servant’s tale” just as I wrote it down that night, as nearly as possible in her own language.

Opening a compartment in my old-fashioned bureau, I draw forth the faded yellow paper, and hold it now beneath my hand. The childish characters, unformed, but not feeble, flash upon my aged sight, bringing with them the Esther of that time, the drooping, dreaming, child-girl, so weak and

yet so strong, whose spirit in its changed tenement still looks out from this worn face, and guides this chilled hand. I steal one moment's pause for thought, a moment which brings me my whole life, and reveals sorrows, shadows, depths in my soul which only the "Searcher of hearts" can read, for to no human being is given the power of showing his *whole* life to another—no, not even by the most elaborate building of words—as we see it ourselves in that instantaneous flash of light which a sudden remembrance of youth illumines in the caves of memory.

This moment past, I dismiss my long-journeying, crowding thoughts with an old woman's smile which is half a sigh; and now I shall transcribe the faded narrative word for word.

"Some account of Miss Alicia Tremaine and my own family, related to me by Prudence White, 10th June, 1805. N.B. We were in the little blue chamber in the turret that faces the setting sun.

"Your dear papa, Miss Esther, was engaged to be married to Miss Mildred. It was an old story in the family, their love-making: it began in the days when the admiral, your grandfather, who was as fierce as a firebrand, was hard upon his son because he wouldn't go to sea. The boy took after his mother, who was a Miss Penstrethick, of Tregarthen, and as good and gentle a lady as ever plucked a flower. And she, in her quiet way, set the child against the sea by telling of the awful swearing and wickedness they big ships too often sails along with, till maybe God's judgment reaches 'em in the tempest, or His hand pulls 'em down on the hidden rocks. Well, your

grandfather would curse dreadful when he heard his wife talk like this, and he'd ask who was to fight the French if the sailors was to be made parsons of, and he'd like to know what good a praying sailor would be to his country; that if an old salt did his duty in the ship, hated the French, drank his grog, and fought like the devil, he might defy Davy Jones, and leave preaching to the chaplain.

“ All this talk and disputing made bitterness grow up between father and son, more especial as my lady took her boy's side, seeming to fear a seafaring life for him with a sort of superstitious dread. Moreover, no one could help seeing that she didn't wish her son to resemble his father in anything, not even in profession. Too true, the admiral had been a wild man in his day, and strange tales of his past life floated into our ears at times. When he was captain, which was long afore my time, his elder

brother met his death in a way which made many a terrible whisper wander round this old place. The elder had the Towers and all the land, while the younger was but badly off, and as he was wild and extravagant, he felt his poverty bitter hard. Some say he asked his brother for money and got plenty, some say he was refused in a cruel way. At all events, when the captain's ship put in at Plymouth his brother went to see him, and the two met often, but whether in anger or in love none knew. At last, one night late, a message came from the captain begging his brother to come aboard to see him, for his vessel was ordered off to join the rest of the fleet, and would weigh anchor at sunrise. So the gentleman goes, and he was seen to get into the ship's boat waiting for him at the stairs, but he was never seen again alive. His body was found floating off Bovisand six days afterwards, and was recognised by his

servants and steward, and took down to Treganowen, where 'twas buried in great state.

“The captain's ship was far out at sea then, and letters were long in reaching him, but when at last he heard the news he wrote back, seeming much surprised at his brother's death, saying he had left the ship alive and well at twelve at night in a shore boat rowed by two men; that he had hailed them himself from the deck, and the captain said he thought he should know these two men again, and he begged they might be searched for. The officers on watch, and some of the crew who were on deck, saw the squire depart, and corroborated this statement, but there were very few among them who noticed the men in the shore boat; hence, when the ship returned, after three years' absence, it is no wonder that among the crowd of boatmen in Plymouth and Dock,* they failed to

* Now Devonport.

recognise those two. Meanwhile, too, though many an honest man at first was took up on suspicion, the circumstance had faded away in people's minds, and every one was more willing to welcome the captain—he was commodore now—than bewail his brother. He came back with French prizes, and had took his part gallantly in the war, so all mouths were full of his praise. And besides, so many of his crew had seen Squire Treganowen leave the ship, that I doubt if ever a whisper would have got abroad against him, if it hadn't been for a drunken old lieutenant, whom the admiral kept here in clover to the day of his death, and he used to hint a story which, bit by bit, as I picked it up in scraps, and patched it into one, grew together much like this.

“And before I tell it, Miss Esther, it is only fair to say that this lieutenant was as crazed a Jeremy-pattic as ever I see. He

died mazed with drink, and even when his poor head wasn't betwattled and roadling* through drunkenness, it was but a chuckle head at best. Here's the story:—

“The captain and his brother met like friends, and drank deep in the cabin till the gentleman, whose wine was helped with something stronger, lay like one dead on the floor. Then the lieutenant, who had kept himself sober, went and fetched from without a crowd of pressed men then lying in irons, a young fellow somewhat resembling the squire. This man's fury and rage on being brought aboard the day before by the pressgang had been so great that he struck an officer, upon which he was instantly condemned by the captain to suffer more lashes the next day than his life could have escaped from. This man they dressed in Squire Treganowen's clothes, and then they hailed the shore boat and put

* Wandering.

him in it, he right glad to escape his punishment, and to gain the heavy sum with which the captain bribed him. How this man died that night none ever knew. There was no money in the pockets of those brave clothes found on the disfigured corpse at Bovisand, but the diamond buckles were in the shoes, the heavy gold watch in the fob, the signet ring on his finger, and these with the clothes were sufficient to his servants and friends to identify the drowned man with Squire Treganowen. Whether he died through the sin of those two men in the boat, or whether his death lies on the admiral's soul, I know not.

“In the morning his unfortunate brother found himself in irons among a crowd of men recently pressed. He raved at first furiously, but the marine on guard thought it nothing strange that a man who was mad yesterday should be still madder to-day.

The only wonder in the ship was that the captain should have had the man brought to his cabin the night before by the second lieutenant; but as the sentry who told this story, with the addition of the prisoner being brought back two hours after excessively drunk, was sartainly what sailors call 'three sheets in the wind' himself, he was not much heeded. Meanwhile, the wretched man, in ragged garments and in irons, after a few ravings, sank down quite bedoled,* and a sort of deadness† came over him through sea-sickness, and, maybe, the drugged wine he'd took. He lied in that shape‡ some days, and I can't tell you what happened that while. Pressed men were cruelly treated in them days, Miss Esther, and perhaps foul air, ill-usage, and horror turned the poor gentleman's brain. At all events, he fell ill of fever, and when he rose

* Stupefied with pain or grief.

† Faintness.

‡ State.

up from that sickness he was not the same man he had been. He was but a poor paltched* body, and he seemed betwattled† like; so when he called himself Ralph Treganowen the sailors only laughed, and told him they had seen the captain's brother in his brave suit of plum-coloured velvet depart in a shore boat at twelve at night. The lieutenant said he'd took up this delusion through having seen the squire in the captain's cabin that night, and Mr. Treganowen had spoke kindly to him, and begged him off his punishment. Every one believed that stram,‡ and the miserable man himself grew so silent and mazed that even he didn't contradict it. Perhaps he had some scheme in his head of escape and vengeance when they should reach land, but the ship kept at sea for months; then they cruised off some islands in a hot sea—

* From palch (Cornish), mending poorly from sickness.

† Turned childish.

‡ Story.

I can't tell you where, Miss Esther, because I'm no scolar—and here the men hoped to go ashore, but the captain refused all leave, and a terrible mutiny broke out among the crew. Two officers were killed afore the captain, and them among the sailors who stood fast, overcame the mutineers. Among the worst of these was that silent, half-mad, fever-stricken wretch, who sometimes called himself Ralph Treganowen.

“The guilty men were taken out of the captain's hands, and lodged in gaol in the islands. They were tried, and sentenced to be hanged. They hang folks now, Miss Esther, in plenty, but five-and-thirty years ago, when this happened, they hanged more; and hanged these men were sure enough, though I have heard say the captain made frantic efforts to save the poor pattic* who called himself his brother.

“The captain was too ill, from a severe

* Simpleton.

wound got in the fight, to give evidence; but there was plenty of witnesses to the mutiny and murder of the two officers besides him; so his voice was not wanted to hang the mutineers.

“The poor patic was ill again in the over-crowded, vile gaol, where the blazing heat so added to the prisoners’ sufferings that they all raved for death, and said blasphemously that hell would be a happy change. In such a place, if the miserable man’s clouded wits would have let him tell his tale clearly, no one would have listened; but some glimmer of family pride in his poor addled brain made him now as anxious to be silent as he had ever been to speak.

“It was when all hope of saving him from the gallows was quenched, that the letter came to the captain on his sick-bed. Many days during the trial he lay insensible, telling of his brother being drowned, and

his body found off Bovisand, and buried in all honour at Treganowen.

“When the lieutenant was very drunk, he would say that this news was sent to the man in gaol, who had then but four hours to live, and it comforted him to know the family name wouldn't be disgraced through him. The lieutenant used to hint darkly of a letter sent back to the captain, written in this awful time before his execution, when the gallows was hungering for the poor wretch, saying that Treganowen Towers, so unjustly won, should pass out of his brother's hands in bloodshed, as he had gained it. The ink in that letter was still wet when the unhappy writer was hanged in the name of the young man whose place he had taken in the ship.

“The captain for long after was like a madman, and when he got well he rushed into the thick of the war, and fought like a man possessed with the fiend. On his re-

turn home to rank, wealth, and honour, all peace and joy seemed to forsake him. The love between him and his young wife and son shrank up, and withered, and died away. They lived beneath the same roof, but madam's rooms were in the west tower, and the admiral's in the east, and they never met save for some cold necessity of business, or for some formal politeness when strangers were by.

“The old lieutenant—a rough, sour man, who had risen from before the mast—kept the admiral company, and perhaps I gleaned more of this tale from their disjointed talk than from any actual revealings of the old drunkard.

“It can't do any harm to speak of these things to you, Miss Esther, now they are all gone dead and past; and I tell you that you may see Treganowen was no happy household, and you cannot wonder your father, as a lad, strolled over as often as he

could to Treval, which was as cheerful then as 'tis gloomy now, for Sir Theobald and his lady loved company, and then their young daughters were called the red, white, and pink roses, so beautiful were they and happy."

CHAPTER XIX.

“MISS MILDRED was the white rose, and she and your father seemingly loved each other dearly. The admiral's lady was glad, and the marriage was settled to take place when her son came of age, no one gainsaying it except his father, who still swore Mr. Ralph should go to sea, and only marry when he'd licked the French like a man. Still the lad stayed at home, and things went on as usual till Lady Tremaine fell sick, and that was the beginning of troubles. The doctors said she must go to a warm climate, and in much sorrow Sir Theobald prepared for his departure, there being great talk at first of all her daughters going with her; but Miss Mildred, natural enough, didn't like to leave

her lover, Mr. Ralph being 'most demented at the thought of it, and Miss Admonitia being like her sister's shadow, going where she went and staying where she stayed; so it ended with only Miss Alicia, the youngest, departing with her mother.

"She was not sixteen then, and the sweetest child that eye could see, though wilful as a pixy.

"Well, Sir Theobald travelled with his wife and daughter and an old relation of hers to Italy, and then, leaving them comfortably settled, he came home. But the anxiety of this long sickness hung over Treval like a heavy cloud, and now her mother was away Miss Mildred began to fret that she hadn't gone with her. More especial did she grieve when letters came with ill news of the invalid, and at such times your father would return from Treval in a gloomy temper. Perhaps Miss Mildred now, in her anxiety and self-reproach, felt

less pleasure in the presence of the lover for whose sake, and at whose entreaties, she had stayed at home. And maybe she let Mr. Ralph see this too plainly. At all events, sharp words came between their love now at times, and the young man was chafed, and fretted.

“About six months after Lady Tremaine’s departure that ghastly, oogle old lieutenant died awful. All the house was woke up in the night by shrieks like the screeches of some one in torments. If Tregeagle had broke loose from Dozemarepool he couldn’t howl worse. We started from our beds, and met each other on the staircases and passages, some with lights and some without, and all asking what was the matter, and none able to tell, till all of a suddint there rushed by us a figure, with a wild look as if he was *hunted* by something, and we saw ’twas the lieutenant. In a minute, as he stared behind him, not at us, there came out

of his throat a yell of pain and horror such as I hope never to hear again. No need to ask now where the screeches come from. We all cried out he was mad, and we women held back terrified, while the men went arter him as hard as they could tear.

“My lady, standing at her door in her long white dress, as pale as ashes, cried out to us to catch him afore he did himself some harm. The admiral coming from the other side of the house, rushed up one staircase with two men, while the rest dashed up another. But the madman kept ahead, and got into a little room at the very top of the east tower, where master had a lot of curiosities stowed away, and here he banged the door and locked it in their faces. With all their strength put forth, it was five minutes before the stout oak gave way, and then, with the moonlight gleaming on him, they saw him for one instant at the window; the next, and he had sprung out, and was

whirling in the air down to the court below, and there his brains were scattered on the stones.

“This event sobered the admiral a good deal. He was afraid to drink as he had done, and he grew more reasonable and kind. There was nothing more said about Mr. Ralph going to sea, and his father spoke to Sir Theobald about the marriage, and agreed it should take place when his son was of age. So now he and Miss Mildred were openly engaged, and all the country side talked of the coming wedding.

“Meanwhile it was thought Lady Tremaine was getting better, and there was hope of her coming home, and Miss Mildred and Miss Admonitia wrote and begged her earnestly to return for the wedding. There was great rejoicing through the country when Mr. Ralph came of age, and the marriage only waited Lady Tremaine's arrival. The poor lady got as far as Paris on her journey,

and there she died quite sudden. Sir Theobald, who had gone to fetch her, wrote home to tell of it, and bade all the tenants come and meet the body at Falmouth, for he was going to bring her to Treval to be buried. It was a grand funeral, sure enough, but it's not of that I've got to tell, but of the change that came over Miss Mildred.

“From the day she heard the news she shut herself up, and would see no one. She seemed like one bedoled, and never spoke except to utter some bitter self-reproach. Her mother's death she thought lay at her door; Alicia, she said, was a giddy thing who knew nothing, and if she had gone to Italy in her stead to nurse her mother, she wouldn't have died. Or if she had not hurried her home for the wedding she might have lived for years in that soft climate. Thus she went on, and the evening they brought Lady Tremaine's corpse to Treval,

Miss Mildred stood by the coffin white as snow, and when your father, whom she had refused to see for days, came and took her hand, she broke out into bitter words, saying her great love for him was an idolatry to which she had sacrificed all duties, and for her punishment he would live to work her fearful woe. She knew this, she said, because she had learned to know his nature better than he knew it himself, and in always yielding to his ever-selfish, ever-changing demands, she had only fostered his imperiousness and fickleness, and it would be hers to gather in the fruit.

“All this she uttered only in grief and passion, clinching her words by a wild vow that for her mother's sake she would do penance, and punish herself by not seeing his face for three months. He knew she spoke in haste and anguish, and he was willing to forgive her words against him, but he could not forget them. And time

after time he rode over to Treval dull and sad, only to return home irritated and chafed by her strange persistence in refusing to see him. Even Miss Admonitia was hard upon him, accusing him of selfishness when he grew angry, and saying it was his counsel to Mildred which had made her refuse to go to Italy with her mother, and his will, his wishes, had ever been Mildred's law, and the least he could do now was to be patient, and bear with her grief, though it had taken a wilful shape. But this was the first time that any act of Mildred's had hurt *him*, so he was *not* patient, and when six weeks had gone by without her once relaxing in her strange penance—surely the hardest to her, poor lady, that she could inflict upon herself—he left Treganowen angrily, and went up to Bath.

“Now when Sir Theobald returned, people had wondered Miss Alicia was not

with him, but soon it came out that the old lady, his relation, had begged so hard that she might stay with her another year that he had consented. So she stopped at Paris; then, as months and months went gloomily by at Treganowen and Treval—for Mr. Ralph did not come home when Miss Mildred's penance was over, and she was too proud to ask him—we heard of her in London, amid lots of gay doings, which sounded strange to us at these two sad houses. For Sir Theobald was a broken man since his wife's death, seeing no one save his two elder daughters in their sable garments; and as for us here, the admiral had grown into an old man, quite querulous and feeble, and my lady was always quiet, and mostly helpless.

“At last, pining for her son, she drove over to Treval, and had a long interview with Miss Mildred. I was more her friend than her servant, so she read to me the

letter she wrote to Mr. Ralph on her return, begging him to come home, for Mildred was sorry she had pained him, and entreated his forgiveness. But Mr. Ralph had a haughty temper, and he could not so easily forget his anger. It was long before he wrote, and then his letter was short and hurried. He could not return just yet, he said; he had made promises and engagements to friends which could not be broken. Mildred should have thought of this before she drove him away from Treval. His love for her had kept him at home continually, and he had seen nothing of the world; but now his leading-strings were broken, and he must see something of life before he settled down. He remarked confidentially to his mother that Mildred had defects in her character, but he had loved her too much to heed them till they had been set in array against himself; but now he thought it best, for his own happiness and for hers, to

show her he was not a man to play the patient servant and lover for ever. He added, in what I thought a reckless tone, that they had better be married at once when he returned home; and he prayed his mother to get Mildred to fix the period of their marriage, for, in order to prove to her that he too could be obstinate, he was resolved not to see her face till their wedding-day was fixed.

“This was a strange, harsh, wild letter to show to Miss Mildred, and my mistress, having no one else to take counsel with, asked me if she should let her see it or not. I was frightened at the thought, and begged her not; but she, it seems, held a different opinion, for she went to Treval, and by her tears when she returned I knew the interview had been a painful one. She told me that night that she had never seen Miss Mildred so humble, and that Ralph need not fear the future, for her love for him was

so great and wonderful that for her part she only dreaded that his wife would be too much a slave to his caprices.

“Shortly after this we heard that Miss Mildred had left her seclusion, and was again receiving visits. Then I knew from my mistress that she had written a heart-rending letter to Mr. Ralph, entreating his compassion and forgiveness for her strange mood, and imploring his speedy return, saying timidly she would fix a period for their marriage when he came.

“Now your father, Miss Esther, was young and thoughtless, and perhaps he had been hardly used by this proud young lady, or maybe he was tired of a courtship that had already lasted too long, and demanded too many sacrifices of him. At all events, he wrote to his mother to say that for three months Miss Mildred had refused to see his face, disregarding all his entreaties; and

now, he scarcely knew why, but he was sick and weary, and little inclined to heed hers. Nevertheless, he prayed his mother to get the wedding fixed as early as possible, for his state of mind now would bear no uncertainty. He would see Mildred again as her husband, but not as her lover; that part of his life was over.

“I believe this strange contradictory letter was but lover’s play, and perhaps a little the insolence of youth and delight of a new power, but it went to Miss Mildred’s heart. I never knew what he wrote to her, but she made no more scruples in fixing her wedding; only she prepared for it sadly, and with a heavy foreboding on her mind.

“Now all this time Miss Alicia was still away; and they had letters from her great-aunt, saying how happy she was, and how little call there was to have her home; but suddenly, about a month before the

wedding, Alicia herself wrote from Bath to say she was coming back to her dear old home; and, sure enough, a few days afterwards here she was, upsetting Treval house with her new-fashioned ways.

“It was just three years and a half since she had gone away, and if she was a pretty child then, she was a lovely and accomplished woman now. She could do lots of things that Miss Admonitia and Miss Mildred knew nothing of. She could speak foreign tongues, she could sing like an angel, and make such music come out of the old harpsichord at Treval that the very birds stopped at the windows to listen. Then she could dance like a fairy—new dances never seen before in these parts—and all her gowns were made in the latest fashion; and her maid dressed her hair so high with bows and side-curls, and bits of lace and jewels, that she was sparkling and

radiant to look at. No wonder the folks left talking of Miss Mildred's pale beauty, and Miss Admonitia's stateliness, to rave only of the damask rose freshly blooming at Treval."

CHAPTER XX.

“MISS ALICIA had been home about a week and all the country side was full of talk of her—the ladies borrowing her fashions, and even Miss Mildred altering her wedding-gowns to the new modes—when Mr. Ralph, with two servants, rides home unexpected, in such hot haste that he took but one day to come from Plymouth to Treganowen. The horses were covered with foam and mud, the servants fagged out ; but Mr. Ralph scarcely stopped to kiss his mother before he vaulted on the back of a fresh horse, and was off to Treval.

“My poor lady, who was an angel of goodness, rejoiced, and said to me that night, with tears in her eyes—

“ ‘Surely, Prudence, I shall see my dear boy now married and happy before I die. I knew it was only a lover’s quarrel between him and Mildred. She loves him most dearly.’

“ I scarcely knew how to answer her, for the two new serving-men from Bath had been talking strange things below, and when we told of our young master’s coming marriage they had laughed, and said ’twas no wonder Mr. Ralph had followed his beautiful betrothed in such hot speed. The other servants were at pains to set them right, and explain that Miss Alicia was not the bride ; but I said nothing, for such a strange feeling of horror and pain nipped my heart that it came upon me all of a sudden that grief was seething for us all.

“ I cannot tell you, Miss Esther, what passed at Treval. I only know that here we servants whispered together that Mr. Ralph’s looks were not those of a bride-

groom. He would ride home from Treval in a fury like one escaping for his life, but only to gallop back there again in an hour with a pale face and set lips. Meanwhile all the preparations for the wedding went on. The family jewels which the old admiral had sent to Paris to be reset came home in the hands of a special messenger; and then the state coach was ordered out, and my lady and the admiral went in great pride to Treval, and presented them to Miss Mildred, in a splendid case, engraved with her new name that was to be.

“When the coach was starting there was a great cry for Mr. Ralph, but he was nowhere to be found. However, when they reached Treval he was found easy enough, leaning over Miss Alicia’s harpsichord, while she sang in one of those foreign tongues her sisters couldn’t understand. There were many guests in the state drawing-room, and Miss Mildred kept up

bravely before them all ; but as they slipped away, so her courage went, till at last, when no one was by, save her father, her elder sister, the admiral, and his wife—for Miss Alicia had gone to the hall-door to speed the parting guests, and Mr. Ralph followed her—then she fell on her knees, and spoke out her bitter grief ; then she implored my lady to take back the jewels and keep them for her son's wife, for she should never be that happy woman. And she pointed to her sister and her lover going by the window, smiling, arm-in-arm.

“The old admiral rose in a fury, and Sir Theobald wept, for his youngest daughter was to him the apple of his eye, and my lady, standing between them, wrung her hands, her heart yearning towards her son, though she loved Mildred too, while Alicia seemed to her a foolish foreign girl, full of airs and graces.

“They all gathered round Miss Mildred,

and kissed and comforted her, striving to persuade her that her poor jealous heart was mistaken; but Sir Theobald held aloof, with his eyes fixed on the window, through which he saw the figure of his youngest daughter, radiant in grace and loveliness.

“I shall never forget that night. Mr. Ralph came home late, and was summoned instantly to his father's room. No word of their whispered talk passed through the closed doors, but, the interview over, the young man came out, white and ghastly as the shadow of death, and went straight to his mother's chamber. She, seemingly, could give him no comfort, and he left her like one in despair. The poor lady called me to her in a voice of anguish, as his step sounded through the corridor, but there were secrets in her heart too heavy for speech, and she could only spend her grief in prayers and tears.

"The next day the old admiral wandered about like a man haunted, muttering to himself, and lifting his stick in the air, as though striking at phantoms. Towards the afternoon we saw with astonishment the Treval coach and outriders coming up the avenue. From an upper window I watched to see whom the carriage brought. It was Sir Theobald, who, since his wife's death, had scarce crossed his own threshold, and who now, as the steps were let down, descended with the feeble gait of a man crushed and broken. He remained closeted with the admiral an hour, and, somehow, a whisper grew around us that he was come to pray him to substitute one sister's name for the other in the marriage settlements. Then Mr. Ralph was sent for, and, strange to say, he was found in the church standing with folded arms before the heavy monument erected to the memory of his uncle. He seemed lost in thought, and when

the servant touched him on the shoulder, he turned round with a start, repeating wildly—

“ ‘Drowned off Bovisand!—drowned off Bovisand! A sad tale, John,’ he said to the man, as if rallying his courage; ‘but, after all, it’s better to be drowned than hanged.’

“ And then he laughed so loud that the old church echoed through and through with the sound.

“ He strode back through the park, moodily, and sprang up the east tower stairs to the room where his father and Sir Theobald were sitting. The interview was soon over, and I saw the baronet go away with a face more shrunk, more careworn, than ever. And now again, by some strange means, a whisper crept through the house that Mr. Ralph stood honourably to his engagement with Miss Mildred, and the marriage was to take place at once. Some-

how his figure filled up our minds in a greater way after this, and there wasn't one of us that didn't serve him with heartier goodwill and respect, mingled with a sort of tender pity, for truly we saw the young man was sick almost to death with grief.

"And now all was bustle and preparation—lawyers coming and going with red-taped parcels—friends and cousins journeying from all parts—servants and mantua-makers at their wits' end. In the midst of this, who should present himself on a sorry horse but Mr. Winterdale."

"Mr. Winterdale!" I exclaimed, interrupting Mrs. White's narrative with astonishment.

"Yes, Miss Esther. He came all the way from London only to look on Miss Alicia's face again, with scarce even the hope of receiving more from her than a civil recognition at church. He found a poor lodging at Trevalla Church-town, and he watched

Mr. Ralph and the three sisters hour by hour as they walked about in the grounds at Treval, or flitted from window to window in the old mansion.

“At last came the day before the wedding, and many papers and parchments were signed at Treval by the admiral and the bride and bridegroom. The admiral came home in good spirits, and, as he walked up and down on the terrace, striking his stick on the ground, I heard him mutter—

“‘Outdone their prophecies this time! The hanged man’s curse drops short—
“What was gained by blood shall be lost through blood.” Ah, ah!—shall it? Why, if I give away the old Towers myself, I don’t see how blood can take them away!’

“So he muttered, and to this day I cannot understand his words.

“The next morning—the wedding morning—rose upon us like the day of doom.

The tardy sun shone down upon two houses plunged in horror and desolation.

"It was scarcely light when a hoarse voice from without bade us undo the door. On obeying, we found a horseman from Treval, haggard with terror and hard riding. In trembling accents he told his tale.

"Treval had been broken into. The wedding jewels were taken from Miss Mildred's bedside, where they lay on a small table, plate and money were stolen, two servants were found gagged and tied; but these evils were nothing: the crowning anguish was that Miss Alicia was missing.

"The weary day went on, and in vain all question, all search and grief—no tidings, no clue reached the wretched inmates of Treval and Treganowen.

"There were no marks of violence on window or door, only the shutter of the dining-room window, behind which a narrow staircase leads to a small cellar, was found

partly off its hinges, as though it had been opened with too rough a strength. Constables and magistrates visited the place and questioned the servants, but still all remained a mystery. The two men whom the burglars had seized related, with all the exaggeration of fright, the appearance of an armed gang in black masks, and with feet unshod, creeping stealthily upon them in the dead of night. The other inmates of the house had heard, had seen nothing; Miss Mildred alone, with a countenance ghastly pale, recounted how her sister, who had not spoken to her for many days, had entered her room—she knew not at what hour—and stooped over her and kissed her, whispering, 'Be happy, Mildred, if you can.' And then she had stolen away as silently as she came.

"Days passed on thus in ghastly emptiness, no tidings of the lost lady reaching us. Mr. Ralph was like a man suddenly

struck by some great horror, fiercer, more tormenting than madness. He rode to and fro incessantly between Treganowen and Treval, his pale face like a spectre's, and his horse's flanks covered with the foam of spurring. But in all these visits he refused cruelly to see Miss Mildred, though Miss Admonitia prayed him on her knees, and though the bereaved father besought him even with tears.

“Another week of anguish, and then the reason became too plain why he would not look on the face of his promised bride, or listen to her passionate pleadings and grief. At the end of that week Mr. Winterdale—the stranger from London, whose silent, hopeless love for Miss Alicia had been the talk of the country side—presented himself here, and asked for the admiral. His pallid countenance, haggard with grief and watching, and bristling, as it were, with some secret horror, scared me as I conducted him

to my master's presence. Before I shut the door I had heard his words:—

“ ‘Sir, you are a magistrate. I demand from you a warrant for the apprehension of Miss Mildred Tremaine for the murder of her sister.’ ”

As Prudence spoke these words, I started from my seat and seized her by the hand. A strange hallucination came over me. It appeared to me that I was familiar already with these terrible events, and was only listening to a twice-told tale. The whole story, and more, infinitely more, than Prudence could tell, presented itself to my mind as something I knew fully, yet could not express, for it passed through my thoughts like a shadow eluding my grasp. There even came dimly into my brain the fancy that a knowledge of Miss Alicia's fate, with every mystery cleared away, lay there within my consciousness, if I could

but seize and gather it up. But the clue, the light was wanting, and sinking back in my chair, prescient of what was coming, and yet unable to tell a word of it, I bade Prudence in a faint voice continue her narrative.

CHAPTER XXI.

“THE admiral refused the warrant with stubborn heat, upon which Mr. Winterdale strode away white with anger, but only to return shortly with Mr. Ralph, who, in a louder tone than his, and with fiercer determination, reiterated his demand for the apprehension of Miss Mildred Tremaine.

“I doubt if the admiral would have yielded to the fury of these two young men if his son had not threatened that he would apply to another magistrate. Then he complied partially, and it was agreed that Miss Mildred should be informed of the suspicions against her, and she and the witnesses who accused her should be ex-

amined privately at Treval before the admiral and two other justices, friends of the family.

“My mistress, whose womanly kindness gave her strength, went with me early to Treval, and broke the news gently to Miss Mildred before the magistrates arrived. But, told ever so gently, the accusation was terrible, and never shall I forget the anguish of that poor young lady as she listened to the tale, and heard that her promised husband was her fiercest accuser.

“I have seen a bird beat himself to death against the bars of his cage in an agony of fear, and I can compare Miss Mildred's terror to nothing but this. She turned her head wildly from side to side, like a poor hunted creature seeking help, and finding none. Then she cast herself down at Mrs. Treganowen's feet, and in piteous accents implored her to say if there was no escape,

no succour on either hand. Her extreme terror made my mistress uneasy, and she kept repeating—

“ ‘But you are innocent, Mildred; then what have you to fear?’

“ Miss Mildred did not seem to care to assert her innocence—perhaps she was too proud. She looked up at Mrs. Treganowen with wild eyes, her young face blanched to a deathly whiteness, while she said in a despairing voice—

“ ‘What will my innocence avail me? I would rather be guilty since Ralph accuses me: that would justify him.’

“ ‘Rather be guilty! rather be the murderer of your sister!’ exclaimed my mistress in horror. ‘Mildred, you don’t know what you are saying.’”

“ ‘Murdered!’ repeated Miss Mildred. “ ‘Who says Alicia is murdered? She is alive, and doubtless well, and happy in her way,’ she added, in a tone of scorn.

"As she made this cruel speech on the hapless young girl, helpless in the hands of robbers, I looked at her, half hoping grief had partly turned her brain, but her proud white beautiful face showed no signs of a disordered wit; it was quivering with anguish in every nerve, and heavy tears rested on her long lashes—signs of bitterness, but not of a crazed mind. As I looked, all my pity seemed to creep away from Miss Alicia to wander hitherwards, and rest upon that poor stricken head. Acting by some sudden impulse, and forgetting that I was only a servant, I went and knelt down by her side.

" 'Miss Mildred,' said I, 'you are speaking truth. Wherever Miss Alicia is, she is happier than you, for she is not falsely accused, or unjustly hated, or spitefully entreated by them she loves. No, she is worshipped, lamented, wept for, and she carries with her the heart of your lover, and

all your life, your honour, and happiness.'

"With a great cry Miss Mildred flung her arms round my neck as I spoke, but she never uttered one word, and I felt by the trembling of her slight body that words were utterly useless here, and were never made for such grief as hers.

"She has always liked me since that day, though neither she nor I have ever spoken of it.

" 'Mildred,' said my mistress, in a trembling voice, 'if you know your sister is alive, why not say so to your father, and to—to Ralph?'

"Miss Mildred looked up with a passionate gleam in her eyes. All this while she had been kneeling on the floor at Mrs. Treganowen's feet, but she moved a little way from her now as she said—

"To Ralph? No, I will never mention Alicia's name to him! Tell my father?

No, it is better he should believe Alicia murdered than think what I think. I have my mother's death on my conscience: I will not kill my father too.'

"With that she crouched down lower on the floor, and hid her face in her hands, never stirring till the door opened. Then she sprang up in such wild terror, and clutched Mrs. Treganowen by the gown in such pitiful, child-like fear, that my heart bled for her.

" 'Are they come to take me to prison?' she said. 'Oh, I am no murderess! I have not killed Alicia—I could not kill any one! Oh, don't let them touch me!—don't let them touch me!'

"She clung to my mistress without looking round, and all this while it was Mr. Ralph standing at the door. I was sobbing, and could not speak.

" 'Ralph,' said his mother—and her voice trembled exceedingly—'this is cruel—

this is unlike a gentleman. Leave us instantly.'

" 'The justices wait,' he answered, coldly, 'and I thought you would rather I told you than another.'

"At the first sound of his voice Miss Mildred turned and stood erect. Her face flushed crimson; then the blood rushing back to her heart left her white as marble. At sight of the man she loved, her wild terror, which had seemed so helpless, so desperate—like the fear of a snared bird, or the agony of a beaten child in the hands of a cruel master—suddenly passed away, and as she turned her proud pale face towards him, no one would have pitied her now.

"She was full of courage, of determination, of hope. Her cheeks shone with a light I had never seen on them before, and her eyes were bright with some strange joy and tenderness.

" 'I am ready,' she said, quickly. Then

she added, in a tone trembling with yearning love, 'Ralph, you should have come earlier. I had need of courage. The sight of you has given it.'

"Embarrassed by her manner, yet too blinded by his own grief to feel the full generosity of her words, he was turning away from the door when Miss Admonitia entered. She thrust him out of her way as she would a reptile, with a passionate hate and scorn that knew no measure, and walked straight up to her sister's side.

" 'Mildred, we will go together,' she said, 'before these *justices*. Wheresoever they take you I will go also.'

"She drew herself up, and waved Mr. Ralph from the door.

" 'Will you make room for us to pass, miserable traitor?' she said, scornfully.

"He shrank before her vehement indignation, and turned his face away; but Miss

Mildred, releasing her sister's arm, darted forward and stood before him.

“ ‘Ralph,’ she said—and she held out her little white hand to him—‘give me a word of comfort before I go to this bitter ordeal and shame. Say Mr. Winterdale edged you on, and it is not you who first accused me. Oh! say this is some madness, and you do not really think me a murderess!’

“In her earnestness she laid her slender, trembling fingers on his arm, but the silken touch acted on him like fire, and he shook it off cruelly with violent hate and horror as he sprang back with a ghastly look, which too plainly told how guilty he thought her. For one moment she quailed, and her white face took that ashy hue which it wears now always; then she looked at him in bitter sorrow, and, taking her sister's arm, she passed out with a firm step, and walked down the great staircase to the justice-room.

"Mrs. Treganowen, weeping bitterly, hastened after her, passing her son with a look of reproach and pain, but without a word of speech. He stood aside to let us go by, as I, holding my mistress by the arm, assisted her trembling steps. Then he followed us silently, his eyes bent on Miss Mildred's figure with a sort of ravenous eagerness, as if he feared she was going to escape.

CHAPTER XXII.

"IN the justice-room Miss Admonitia and my mistress sat on either side of Miss Mildred, but she scarcely seemed to need their support. Except for her ashy paleness she appeared calm, while Miss Admonitia, on the contrary, visibly found it difficult to restrain her indignation. She flushed continually, and sometimes interrupted the proceedings by some fiery word of contempt or remonstrance. My poor mistress was the most agitated of the three, but she kept silent, only watching her son continually, and wringing her hands when he gave his evidence against Miss Mildred.

"Sir Theobald was not present. He lay on his bed in dangerous sickness. His

daughters had watched by him the whole night, and Miss Admonitia had only quitted him to place herself by her sister's side during this fearful hour.

“Mr. Winterdale was the first witness examined. It appeared this unhappy young man was in the habit of prowling round the house and grounds of Treval, in the hope of feasting his eyes for a moment on the object of his hopeless love. Hidden behind trees, in arbours, and among clumps of shrubs, he had been a witness to many a sorrowful interview between the sisters. He had heard cruel threats, and longings for vengeance, and bitter hate, and hard words enough to hang a dozen; but what went the farthest to implicate Miss Mildred were the secret meetings which he had watched between her and a man of coarse and ruffianly aspect, a stranger in these parts, and who it was proved had been seen with the dashing and handsome scoundrel supposed to be the

captain of the band. As Mr. Winterdale gave this evidence, those present who believed in Miss Mildred's innocence grew uneasy, and many significant looks passed between them.

"Then Mr. Ralph was called, and although in some respects he was a most unwilling witness, answering all questions relating to his past love for Mildred, and his present passionate affection for Alicia with reluctance, still enough was elicited to show that Miss Mildred had cause to hate her sister, and was anxious to be rid of her. On one point Mr. Ralph gave evidence eagerly. He proved that Miss Mildred had been the first to miss her sister, and make earnest search for her through the house, her terror and anguish during this time being apparently unfeigned, but he was grieved to say he had reason afterwards to think them insincere, for when all hope of finding Alicia was over she broke out into

bitter invectives against her, and gave vent to expressions of contempt, and unnatural hate that appalled her listeners. He also related the story Miss Mildred had told him of her sister's visit to her chamber in the night, and how, by an accident, he had discovered this story to be entirely false, and had thus been first led to suspect her as an accomplice in Alicia's abduction.

"He sat down after thus speaking and looked steadily at his mother, though his face was blanched to the hue of death. Doubtless he felt bitterly the cruel part he was taking, and yet would not shrink from what he considered his duty.

" 'Call Sarah Tregellas,' said one of the magistrates hastily, as though glad to break the painful silence.

"A sinister-looking woman of about fifty came forward and answered to her name.

"I knew her, and had never liked her

much. She had been Lady Tremaine's maid, and had gone abroad with her, being much trusted by the family ; but she was of a vindictive temper, as all her fellow-servants at Treval too well knew.

“ In answer to questions she proved that she had that night a quarrel with Martha, Miss Mildred's maid, whose room she always shared, and that in the heat of her passion she went down to complain to Miss Mildred, but when she got into the sitting-room, which communicated with that young lady's chamber, she thought better of it, but being unwilling to return to her bed where Martha was, she made up her mind to sleep on the sofa in this room. Accordingly she locked the door, that she might not be surprised by the servants in the morning, and she found the door still locked when she was awoke by the cry of the robbery. Thus it was impossible anyone could have entered Miss Mildred's apart-

ment, as the only entrance to it was through the sitting-room. Miss Mildred was still up when she established herself on the sofa. There was a light in her room, and she was moving about. Martha, who had been assisting her to pack, had not left her more than half-an-hour.

"You will recollect Miss Mildred had asserted that her sister came to her bedside long after she had fallen asleep; it was evident, therefore, her visit did not take place during the interval between Martha's departure and Sarah's arrival in the sitting-room.

"In apparent contradiction to Sarah's testimony was the fact that the bridal jewels had certainly disappeared from the table in Miss Mildred's room where they were placed. But strange looks that passed from face to face in the justice-room, too plainly told that a cruel suspicion had crept over the hearers, that Miss Mildred had

herself made away with this casket, in order to render her story more plausible. In truth, the circumstantial evidence against her was so strong that as I listened to it I trembled, and I saw that the two magistrates, who had seated themselves on the bench with a kindly bias in her favour, were now struck with a belief in her guilt. They would have committed her to prison on the charge of having conspired with a band of robbers and burglars unknown for the abduction and concealment of her sister, had not the admiral opposed himself against their decision with all the force of his character.

“The room was cleared that the justices might consult together; but Miss Mildred was already considered a prisoner, and a constable followed us as we bore the unhappy young lady away into another apartment. As word by word the evidence grew against her into a great pile of facts,

proving the bitter hatred, the sharp jealousy, and strife between the sisters, she had listened to it with the same pale, ashy face that she wore when Mr. Ralph flung off her hand from his arm; but I saw a kind of wonder mingled with deep shame, and pain gather in her eyes, as, profaned by many lips, this cruel history of her love, her sufferings, her hate, was thus gradually unfolded before them.

“And now, when the prospect of a prison, with all its shame and disgrace, seemed imminent—when so many faces had bent shuddering looks of horror upon her as she passed—Mr. Ralph averting his, as though the sight of her were too dreadful a thing to bear—her courage again gave way, and she sank down upon the floor at my mistress's feet, cowering, trembling, helpless with fear and misery.

“Miss Admonitia paced the room in a fury of scorn and anger, and, rushing now

to her sister's help, she would have carried her into the garden for air, but the constable stood at the tall window which opened on the terrace, and refused to let her depart. Miss Admonitia's high spirit could not brook this insult, and she peremptorily ordered the man to leave the room; at the same time she pushed open the window and strove to pass out, bearing the fainting Miss Mildred in her arms. But the constable, with coarse, hard words, laid his hand on the shrinking young lady and forcibly detained her; and as Miss Mildred stood for a moment with that brutal grasp on her little delicate arm, I saw her white lips move as if in prayer, then shriek after shriek burst from her, and escaping from him, she rushed forward and clasped her arms wildly round Mr. Ralph, who at that moment appeared at the door. He had no time to thrust her from him before her words broke out incoherently—

“ ‘Ralph, I am innocent! Oh! believe me, or I shall die! I have not touched a hair of Alicia’s head. Oh! I implore you listen to me, else how can I tell what my anguish may cause me to do, or to say?’

“ ‘If it only makes you speak the truth, Miss Tremaine,’ said Mr. Ralph, coldly, ‘I shall be satisfied.’

“ ‘Then you do not believe me?’ she said, as she looked desolately in his face.

“ ‘I grieve to say I do not,’ he answered.

“As he spoke, the passionate clasp of her clinging hands unclosed, and she withdrew from him with a look upon her white face that haunts me to this day.

“ ‘Admonitia,’ she said, ‘I am alone now—alone for the rest of my life, happen what may.’

“As she uttered these words an indescribable change passed into her voice; it

took nothing from its silvery sweetness, but it seemed as if something had died in it—as if the chords of hope and love had snapped, and could never speak their sweet music again in her tones. Her voice keeps this desolate ring still, and I never hear it without recalling that scene in her life.

“As she spoke, Miss Admonitia turned towards Mr. Ralph with fierce indignation.

“‘Are you come to insult us by witnessing our degradation and misery?’ she cried. ‘Have you not done enough, or was it you who ordered this ruffian to strike my sister?’

“Mr. Ralph’s face flushed hotly.

“‘Leave the room,’ he said to the man hastily; ‘my presence here is sufficient.’

“Perhaps he meant this kindly, but Miss Admonitia’s eyes flashed fire on him.

“‘It wanted but this,’ she said, ‘that you should make yourself Mildred’s gaoler.’

“Mr. Ralph did not answer her. The poor young man, bewildered by grief and passion, bent over his weeping mother, and implored her in urgent whispers to leave a house in which, he said, murder, hate, and treachery were lurking.

“Meanwhile, after a stormy discussion in the justice-room, the magistrates had consented to take bail for Miss Mildred’s re-appearance that day fortnight. Accordingly, Sir Theobald and another gentleman were bound over in a large sum, and, these heavy proceedings over, the crowd, the bustle, the noise quitted the house, and we were left alone in the quiet of despair, of grief, and sickness.

“Think of it all, Miss Esther, picture it, to yourself, if you can. An old servant like me knows not where to find the burning words that might tell the fiery anguish

of those bitter days. Perhaps you can fancy the deathly quiet of the house as the loud excitement died out of it, leaving pale fear and horror behind. Perhaps you can fancy the servants whispering in groups, and starting at an outspoken word; you can fancy the terror, the hush, the unnatural stillness of that household; but you can never call up before you, Miss Esther, the untold woe on the pale faces of the sisters, neither can you measure the grief of the old man by whose bedside they sat.

“My mistress did not forsake that house of grief, but she seemed perishing day by day, and I saw her face quail and her hands tremble whenever Miss Mildred approached her—signs by which I judged that Mr. Ralph had at last impressed her with his own belief.

“Day after day broke over us slowly, heavily, and, save for Sir Theobald’s amend-

ment, no ray of comfort touched Treval. A week passed by, and then the whole country side was roused by the news of an audacious burglary at a house about twenty miles off. This was followed by two or three most daring highway robberies, and every one took the alarm. Gentlemen had themselves sworn in as special constables—and among them were Mr. Ralph and Mr. Winterdale;—people stayed up all night in their houses pistol in hand, soldiers were sent for, and the whole country was in excitement. In the midst of this a man taken up on suspicion escaped from the cage where he was confined, but he left a pocket-book behind him, and in it was found a letter addressed to Miss Mildred Tremaine.

“It was a coarse scrawl, and contained only these words:—

“ ‘Miss,—Him as you know on will meet you by the Wishin’ Well, in Treval Wood,

too-marrow night, at ten o'clock. Your sistur must knaw nauthin, or——'

"The rest was torn off; but you can imagine to what a height of distrust the discovery of this letter raised the general feeling against Miss Mildred.

"Some of the distant gentry and magistrates took the matter up. The amount of the bail given was doubled, and orders were issued that Treval should be watched day and night. Constables were even placed in the house, and not one of the wretched servants, upon whom also suspicion fell, laid his head on his pillow at night without thinking he might be a prisoner in the morning.

"Amongst the keenest watchers in the woods and grounds of Treval were Mr. Ralph and Mr. Winterdale; but the man for whom they waited came not.

"At length it was resolved to show the letter to Miss Mildred, and ask her if she

knew the writer. She took it in her hand and answered simply that it was certainly written by the man whom she had met two or three times secretly in Treval Wood, on affairs of her own, and the sister to whom he alluded was the elder one, and not Alicia. She had wished to make Miss Admonitia acquainted with this man's business with her, and he had objected; hence the mention of her sister in the letter.

“Upon being pressed to divulge this person's name and abode, she had replied haughtily that she knew neither—that it was not likely any facts concerning such a man could be within her knowledge. All questions touching her reasons for meeting him she declined to answer, contenting herself by a solemn declaration that they in no way concerned her sister Alicia.

“Nevertheless, secret as Miss Mildred was in some things, she seemed recklessly

defiant in others, for when, a few days later, her banker sent to one of the magistrates to say she had drawn out a large sum just before the disappearance of her sister, she at once confessed that she had intended the money for this man to take him to America. This sum was stolen on the night of the burglary at Treval, and Miss Mildred did not in the least scruple to say that she suspected this very man to have taken it, thereby acknowledging that she believed or knew him to be one of the band in whose hands her sister's life now lay.

“After this strange occurrence, whispers began to float about that Miss Alicia was certainly murdered. Mr. Ralph grew frantic as he heard this report. Long watching, fasting, and grief had almost turned his brain. He forgot all delicacy and kindness, and loudly declared his belief that the amount of bail would be willingly forfeited by Sir Theobald, and Miss Mil-

dred would make her escape before the assizes. He avowed openly his determination to prevent this supposed escape, and for that purpose he and Mr. Winterdale, in their office of special constables, got an order from the magistrates to watch Treal. The justices found some pretence for this proceeding, but the sisters knew well why these two unhappy young men espied them in their lonely walks, and watched under their windows.

"It is this part of his conduct, Miss Esther, which your father thinks Miss Mildred can never forgive, especially as, one day in the grounds, she stopped as they passed, and said gently—

"‘Mr. Winterdale, I can forgive *you*—you do not know me. Mr. Treganowen, you know me—a million years of suffering on your part would not buy my pardon.’

"Your father then had no thought of

asking her for pardon. Maddened by Alicia's loss, he cast himself in her path as she would have passed on, and implored her to relent towards her unhappy sister. He pleaded for her life with his, entreating that it might be spared, with bitter anguish conjuring her to break this stern silence, and tell him to what fate she had sold the wretched Alicia.

"Miss Admonitia would not let her answer this wild appeal. She pulled her away, proudly disdaining to speak to the miserable young men who had taken upon themselves so thankless an office.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"A MONTH passed on, and although placards offering large rewards had been posted all over the county, although constables had scoured the country far and near; and gentle and simple, pitying the wretched family, had joined with them hand and heart in the search for the lovely young lady missing, neither she nor the robbers with whom she had disappeared could be traced. The sole victim on whom human justice could lay its hand was Miss Mildred. She had been unable to explain the principal facts that told against her. She had persisted in her assertion that her sister visited her room that night, at what hour, or by what means—supposing Sarah's tale true—she knew

not. She had positively refused to give any reason for her secret meetings with the man suspected of belonging to the gang of robbers, and neither the fear of a prison, nor the anguish of her father and sister, nor the prayers and agony of Mr. Ralph, could shake her wonderful resolve to be silent on the matter. She was much moved when Mr. Ralph flung himself before her on Christmas Day, and implored her, for the sake of that holy time, and all its dear recollections, to take pity on him, and confess to what fate she had sold her unhappy sister.

“God knows what suffering wrung her heart as he spoke thus. She did not show it or complain of it; she only clasped her hands and gave the same cold answer, that she knew nothing of her sister's fate; but there was a more passionate tone in her voice as she solemnly asserted, as she had ever done, that her business with that

strange man concerned herself alone, and in no way touched Alicia. She doubted not, she said, that he was a scoundrel—the greater her misfortune that she was obliged to speak to him ; but she had asked him no questions—his very name and place of abode were unknown to her. Then with a long, painful, pitiful gaze upon Mr. Ralph's hard, unbelieving face, she gathered up her black dress and turned away from him, crossing the lawn, and seating herself on the old grey seat at the foot of the cedar tree. He, firmly believing in her guilt, followed her with no kind look or kind word. He spoke to her no more, but he often waylaid Miss Admonitia, imploring to know if she had relented, if a word had passed her cold lips concerning her sister, and whether there was any, even the faintest, hope of finding that unhappy lady. To such appeals Miss Admonitia always opposed a quiet scorn, passing on without a word. She believed

in Miss Mildred : she believes in her still.

“Let me hasten on, Miss Esther ; you will hear this tale told by a more skilful tongue than mine. My poor words have no wit to paint the picture of that time. Enough that the dark Christmas went by slowly like a dirge, the sun at the end of each short day dropping into the sea red as blood. From the towers of Treganowen my mistress and I watched it at evening with a shudder, not knowing what deed of horror the morrow might bring to light. For were there not voices among us whispering that the robbers had never seen Miss Alicia—never touched her. Miss Mildred alone had murdered her in the dead of night, and hidden the body in some lone place known only to her. They never thought of Miss Mildred's little hands and frail, slight arms, when they said this ; their malice was blind and stupid, as malice ever is.

"Mr. Ralph was not with his mother. He had no home now; the admiral had forbidden his son to enter his doors again. At every fresh outbreak of cruelty or suspicion on Mr. Ralph's part against Miss Mildred he wept; he tore his grey hair from his head by handfuls, and, holding it out before Heaven, he cursed his son in awful words. He wished that he who rejected the love of the noblest girl on earth, calling her 'liar' and 'traitress,' might have a liar and traitress for his wife, and ally himself with the villany and murder which he now laid upon the head of the innocent.

"My mistress shuddered and wept to hear him. In her heart of hearts I distrusted her of hiding a fear, a shrinking thought of Miss Mildred's guilt, and therefore excusing her son; but the admiral, who had no such thought, could not forgive him.

“The new year came in with stormy gusts of rain and tempests of wind, and sharp frosts followed by sudden dreary thaws, in which wintry time, cowering in gloom and fear, we began to count the days to the assizes when Miss Mildred would be brought up to answer her bail, and set before the judge for trial. But on the 22nd of January the servants at Treval, opening the door of the north porch, stumbled in the dark morning over a rude coffin or chest. Silent, breathless, with hearts beating, they wrenched the lid, and there lay before them the body of Miss Alicia Tremaine. Servant after servant gathered around and gazed in horror on her pale face before they found courage to summon her wretched father and sisters. Then, amid heavy tears and sobs, and cries of anguish, they lifted the poor corpse out of that rude resting-place, and carried it to the room where it had lain in life and joy.

Then they saw she had been stabbed to the heart after a heavy blow on the forehead, which happily must have deprived the poor sufferer of sense, but which had greatly disfigured her once beautiful face. Save for the profusion of bright brown hair, the dark brows, the long lashes, the little hands, and the clothes she wore, few would have recognised in this pale, ghastly figure the lovely Alicia Tremaine. Beneath the head of the corpse lay the missing casket of pearls prepared for the bridal of Miss Mildred.

“When Sir Theobald first looked upon the features of his dead child, he gave one helpless cry and sank senseless into the arms of his servant; hence all things fell into the hands of his two daughters, and wonderfully well they ordered them.

“Until the officers of justice came nothing was touched, and it was in their presence that Miss Alicia's body was carried

to her room, and the casket was discovered and examined. The strange letter found in the lining, which you have read, Miss Esther, went greatly to prove that Miss Mildred was innocent. Coroner and jury were brought hastily together, an inquest was held, and a verdict returned of murder against some person or persons unknown.

“In spite of the letter, which was proved to be in the writing of Miss Alicia, the magistrates were still divided in opinion as to Miss Mildred's implication in a crime which had rid her of her sister, when a highwayman, shot by a gentleman in self-defence, in dying made and signed a confession, in the presence of a justice of the peace, to the effect that Miss Mildred was entirely innocent of the abduction of her sister. He declared himself to be the man whom she had met by the wishing-well in the wood, but, by every solemn word a dying man could use, he asserted that her

motive for seeing him was good, and true, and pure, and in no way did it regard Miss Alicia. When questioned if it concerned Mr. Ralph, he broke out with an oath, saying he had promised to keep the business secret; and though he had never yet kept his word to living man or woman, he would keep it now to Miss Mildred. On this point he was obstinate—on all others he answered freely.

“He confessed to being one of the gang who entered Treval on the night of the 15th November, but he added the incredible assertion that Miss Alicia herself admitted them, and accompanied them willingly on their departure. He hinted that she had done this for the sake of some one she loved, but he would divulge no more on this point, refusing to give the person's name or any details concerning him, on the plea that the information might injure his comrades, and he scorned, he said, to die a traitor

to his friends. He expressed great horror on hearing of Miss Alicia's murder, declaring himself entirely ignorant of the fact, and avowing that he had seen her but a short time since, alive and well.

"This extraordinary confession, made at the moment of death, when the man had nothing to hope or to fear from this world, coupled with the letter found in the casket, and various other circumstances too minute and numerous to tell of now, proved plainly Miss Mildred's innocence. She was released from the terrible position in which Mr. Ralph's unjust suspicions had been the original means of placing her, but she has never held up her head since. She has always lived as though some horrible doom were hanging over her by a single hair.

"Apparently the death of their accomplice, and the dread of what he might have confessed, frightened the gang of miscreants out of the country, and we heard of no more

robberies, but we heard likewise no tidings of the culprits. All search seemed fruitless. Doubtless they have perished miserably, as all such men perish, but, if so, not one of them in dying has cleared up the mystery of this their worst crime.

“Miss Alicia was buried in the old church at Trevalla, where a single line on a slab of white marble records merely her age and the simple word ‘Alicia’ without surname. Some say that the mere suspicion of her having disgraced the name of Tremaine was sufficient to hinder the proud family from placing it on her tombstone; others aver that Miss Alicia was married, and the blank space left on the marble will be filled in one day. At all events, the robber’s confession has left a blot on her fair fame, and I have seen a blush burn hot on Miss Admonitia’s proud face when this sad point in her sister’s strange fate has been touched on.

"A great crowd stood in and around the church on the day of the funeral; but among the multitude it seemed to me that I saw only the faces of those upon whom all gazers' eyes were turned—the pale faces of the two sisters who stood on each side of their father.

"Miss Admonitia, with her veil down, stepped proudly on, disdaining to look at friend or foe; but Miss Mildred, with her veil up, and her fair cheeks of a terrible whiteness, turned her eyes, all tearful, from side to side, with an air of distraction and grief very pitiful to see.

"Was she seeking for sympathy?—was she looking for the pity she was never to gain?

"The people knew that she was innocent, or rather that the shadow of guilt which had rested on her was cleared away; yet they shrank from her, and muttered as she passed. Still she kept up bravely, only

looking distractedly from side to side, as I have said, till her eyes met the face of Mr. Ralph Treganowen; then she visibly shivered, and the great tears, held in with such a touching sad strength till now, fell one by one down her white cheeks. At last, as the earth fell upon the coffin, and he who should have been *her* lover with a great cry of grief hid his face within his hands, she clutched her father's arm and fell forward almost into the vault. Miss Admonitia, with a quiet, firm hand caught her, and Miss Mildred heard no more of the solemn words that consigned her sister to the dust. She was carried from the church and laid down insensible upon a grave, Mr. Winterdale standing over her with a stern, watchful face.

“Mr. Ralph wrung his mother's hand at the church door, and departed. He never saw his mother's or his father's face again. He joined the army abroad, and when he

returned my master and mistress were both at rest.

“The admiral was a broken man both in health and mind. Only in one thing was he strong and unchanged—that was in his belief in Miss Mildred, and in his love for her. Many a time as he walked up and down—a dying man—on the sunny south terrace, I have seen him strike his stick into the ground, and murmur—

“‘A noble girl!—by heavens, a noble girl!’

“Then he would mutter—

“‘Ralph—Alicia—God help them both?’

“He wandered much in his mind before he died, raving of a brother's curse, and calling out to his wife to take down the lie that stood in the church.

“My mistress allowed no one to wait on him but Miss Mildred, herself, and me. She stood by him night and day. She prayed unceasingly for him, with his thin

hand clasped within her own. The long estrangement of so many bitter years seemed forgotten now; death's coming shadow chased all other shadows from their hearts.

"Sometimes he bade his wife and Miss Mildred not to pray for him, because it was hopeless; at other times, in a voice of agony, he implored them to kneel and cry to God for him loudly.

"So the scene shifted with him till the last came. His worst mood was when he jested fiercely.

" 'I only meant to give him a lesson,' he cried—'a practical lesson. I meant a grim joke—that was all. Ha! ha!'

"Then he would laugh, and afterwards weep; and in an old man it was a sad sight to see.

"One day, when he was calm, he took Miss Mildred's hand, and looking her in the face, suddenly kissed her.

“‘A martyr!’ he murmured; ‘but God sees it.’

“‘Hush!’ said Miss Mildred softly, as she looked round on me; but he persisted—

“‘A martyr, because you have loved me and mine. You see, Mildred, it is true; Treganowen Towers have passed away from me in blood—in blood—blood!’

“Here he raised his voice, and the room rang with the terrible word. Miss Mildred soothed him with her tears and caresses, and signed to me to leave the room. As I stood at the door without I heard that wondrous calm, clear voice of hers, like a golden ripple, assuaging his agony in the sweetest music of prayer, drawing down the angels of pardon and peace to speak comfortably to him, as he passed through the valley of the shadow of death.

“He died the next day, calling out in his last thirst for wine; but as I put the glass to his mouth he thrust it away, crying out

that it was blood; and with this word on his lips his soul departed.

“Twelve months of widowhood, and then the gentle spirit of my mistress went to God. In tending her, as in tending the admiral, Miss Mildred was still the ministering angel of the house, but we servants did not like her. We hated to meet her in the dark passages alone; she seemed to bring a chill and a shiver with her as she passed. Often the sight of her white, uncomplaining face seemed to turn my very blood cold, as it glanced by all icy and shining. As I saw her creeping about in her silent way, so soft of step, so silvery of voice, she seemed to me not like anything real, but like a spirit in a woman's garb. The rustle of a robe, or a sweet echo, like the music that rises at night from the graves of the just, that was all one heard when she passed—nothing more.

“She seemed mistress here when the

admiral and his wife were both gone, but all changes that took place by her orders were made so quietly that people scarce noted them. Still there were whispers about that the Towers were hers; but when Mr. Ralph came home unexpectedly at the end of three years she bade us consider him as master, and she contradicted these reports in a calm, determined way that silenced people.

“Mr. Ralph came home, as the old saying goes, ‘a sadder and a wiser man;’ he was also handsomer and more manly. It caused at first some scandal that Sir Theobald received him kindly at Treval, but the old man could not forget that, if he had persecuted and betrayed his second child, it was for love of the youngest, the jewel of his house.

“Judge of our surprise when we heard that not only was this love faded and clean gone, and all the past forgotten, but

Mr. Ralph was suing to Miss Mildred for forgiveness, and entreating her to be his wife.

“At first there was some talk of her consenting; then suddenly she refused with an intensity of purpose wonderful in a woman only then three-and-twenty. Again Mr. Ralph left the country, and never returned till last winter, when you, Miss Esther, flung that paper at his feet from the roof of Treval.

“Many tales linger still about the country concerning Miss Alicia. They say she haunts the house, and sometimes at night is seen on the roof more like a creeping shadow or crouching animal than a woman; and there in the moonlight she flits to and fro painfully, searching blindly for her murderer, for until his crime is brought to light, people say there will be no rest for her pale ghost.

“Miss Esther, my tale is ended. You

need not look at me so wishfully; I have held back nothing that I know."

Here ends the narrative of Prudence White. On reading it over to her a week or two after I had written it down, she said I had used grander words than hers, especially in the latter part. Perhaps she is right; my pen is too young and unskilful to retain the simple language, the kind old homely words, in which she told the story, ever keeping her own unselfish gentleness, her true service, her faithful love in the background.

Nevertheless, like glinting sunshine, these virtues cross the dark web of this history, bringing a bright thread here and there among its shadows and crime; though, perchance, my hand, unequal to the task, has, in guiding the shuttle, failed to show them in their truest beauty, or place them in their fullest light.

END OF VOL. I.

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